Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

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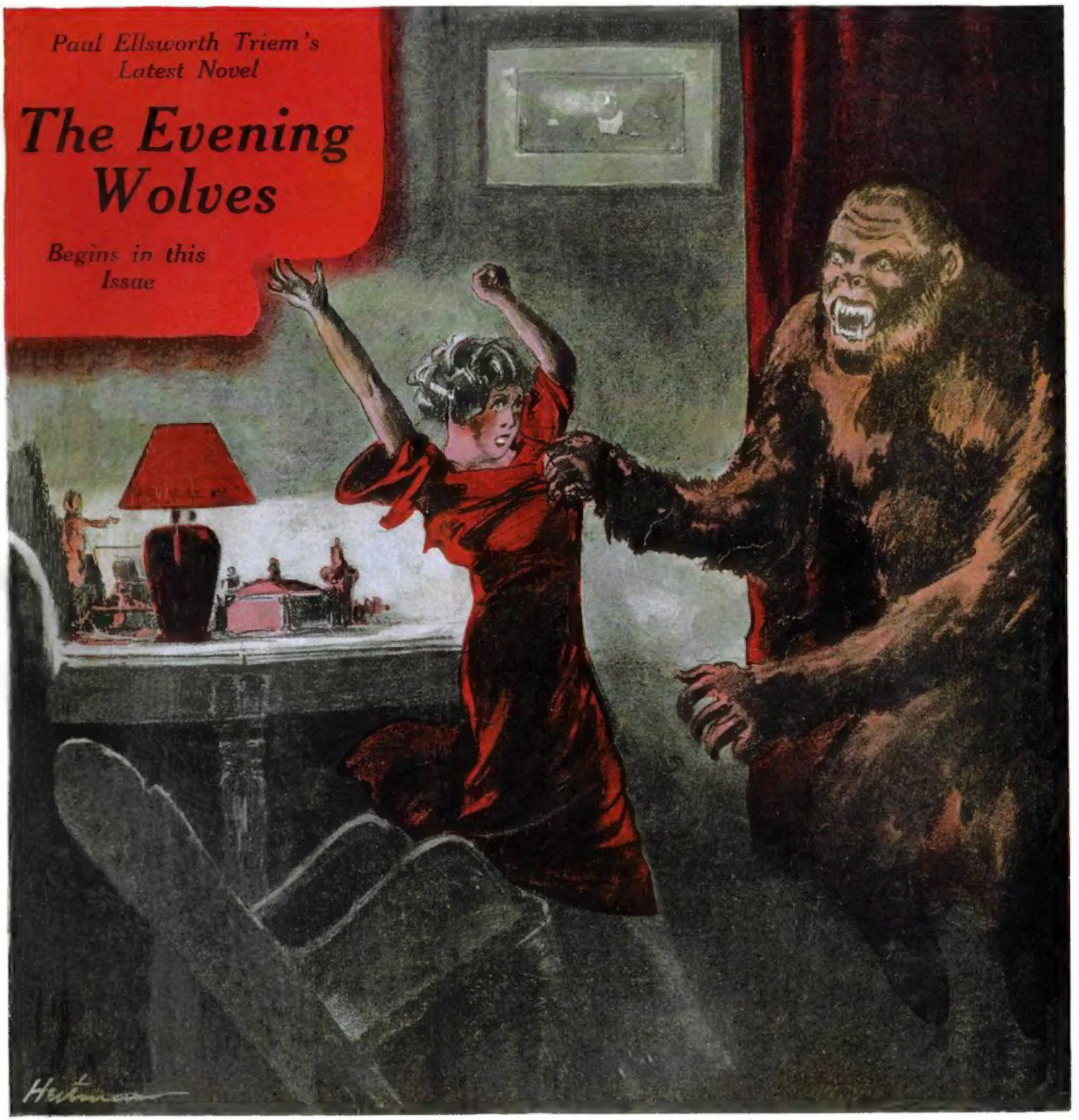

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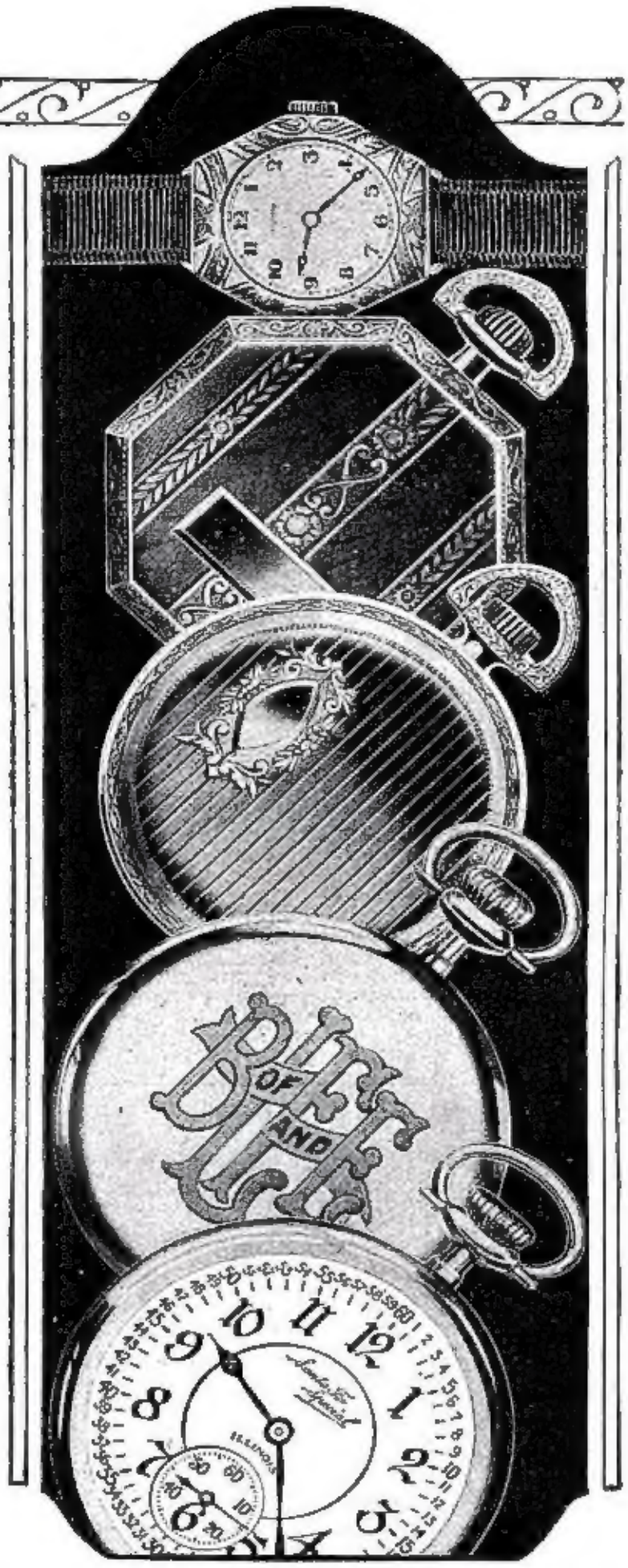

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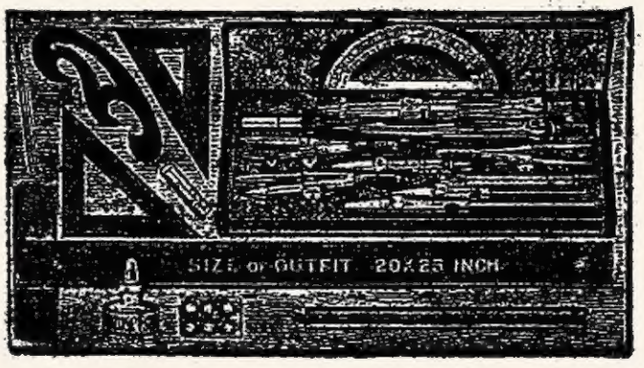

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WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

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Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

A Long-Sought Secret, Vital to Happiness, Has Been Discovered.

By H. M. Stunz

Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
—Omar Khayyam.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman, has been solved. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" of financial success. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—success and happiness in love and marriage—and there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of science and its value has been proved. It "works." And because it does work—surely, speedily and most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in many years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from lives of disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is that it removes physical handicaps which, in the past, have been considered inevitable and irremediable. I refer to the loss of youthful animation and a waning of the vital forces. These difficulties have caused untold unhappiness—failures, shattered romances, mysterious divorces. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes the organism and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.

But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of youth too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verses, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search—without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth," an infallible method of renewing energy lost or depleted by disease, overwork, worry, excesses or advancing age.

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The author is an idealist who recognizes the sacredness of the sex function and the right of children to be loved and desired before they are born. Very, very few of us can say truly that we were the outcome of the conscious desire of our parents to beget us. They, however, were not to blame because they had not the knowledge which would have enabled them to control conception.

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"I feel grateful but cheated," writes one man, "Grateful for the new understanding and joy in living that has come to us, cheated that we have lived five years without it."

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Editor-in-Chief of "Health and Life"

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The Unique Magazine

WEIRD TALES

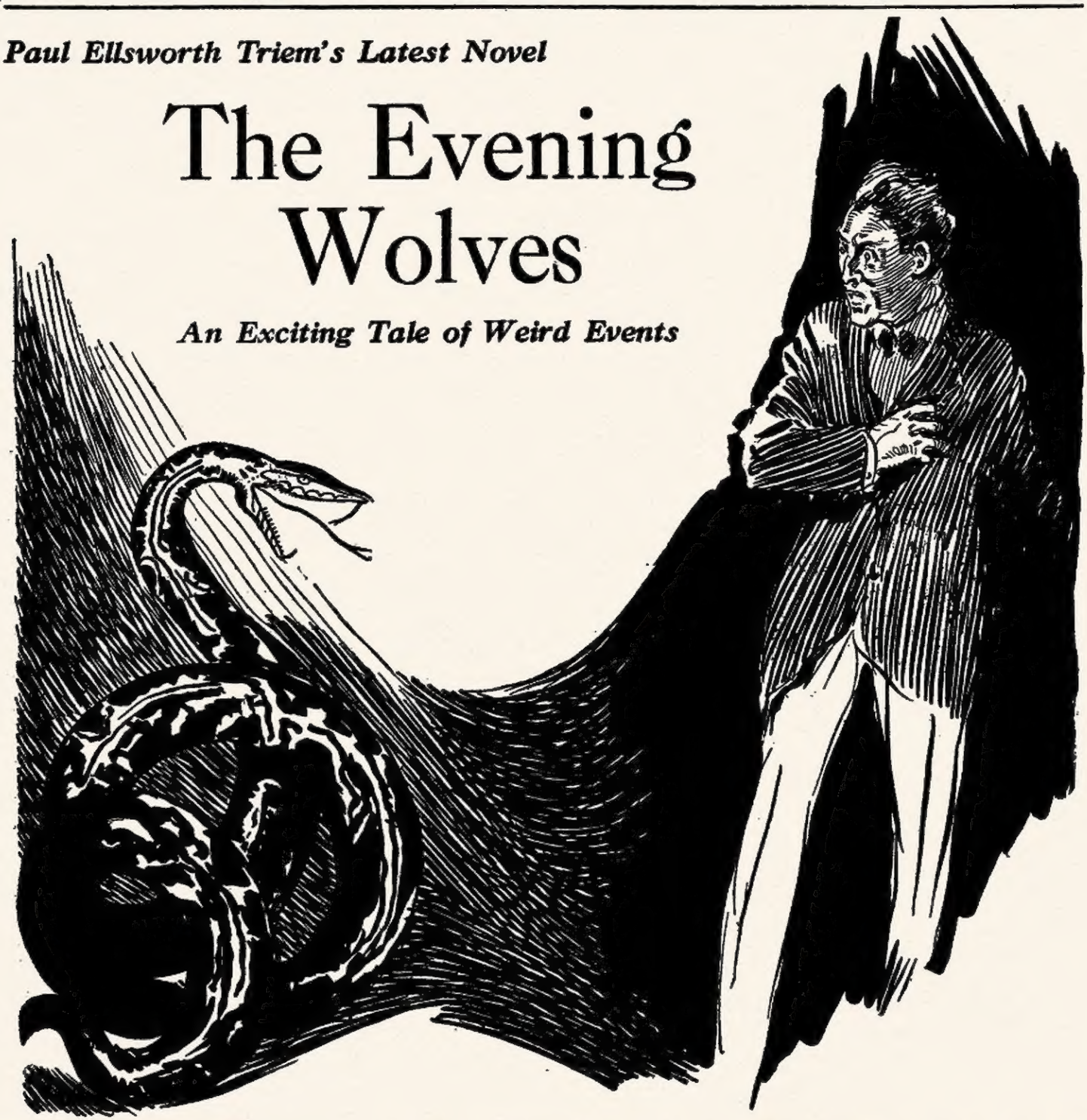
Edited by Edwin Baird

VOLUME ONE NUMBER FOUR 25c a Copy JUNE, 1923 Subscription $3.00 A YEAR $3.50 IN CANADA

Paul Ellsworth Triem's Latest Novel

The Evening Wolves

An Exciting Tale of Weird Events



CHAPTER ONE

'AH WING RECEIVES A CLIENT

A TAXICAB stopped on the corner, and two people got out. They formed a decidedly incongruous pair; for the first to alight was a diminutive Chinese boy, scantily dressed, while his companion appeared to be a portly white man.

It was impossible to be sure of this fact, however, as this second passenger wore a long overcoat, with its ulster collar turned up around his face, and a dark cloth cap with the visor drawn down over his forehead and eyes.

Evidently the cab driver had been paid in advance, for he swung out from the curb as soon as his fares had dismounted, and was soon out of sight. The Chinese boy glanced at his companion, then set off silently up a street whose central portion was paved with cobblestones.

He seemed to know just where he was going. He paused only once, to cast a fleeting glance over his shoulder. Then he resumed his journey.

He had seen that the man in the ulster was following; and now, after traversing half a block of squalid, deserted street, the youngster turned abruptly into a pestilential-looking alley. This alley lay close to the top of a hill, and for a moment the man and the boy, who appeared to be his guide, could look down over the roofs to where the gay lights of Chinatown twinkled alluringly.

Presently the diminutive Oriental paused just outside a doorway. The man who had been following him came up, with a curious suggestion of eagerness and suspicion. Looking over the shoulder of the figure before him, he was able to make out the entrance to a narrow flight of unlighted stairs, which plunged steeply into the earth beneath a dilapidated building.

"Do we have to go down there, boy?" the man demanded.

"All a-same down here, master," the youngster replied. "You come close—I show you!"

He began to descend as he spoke; and the man, after a moment of hesitation, plunged through the doorway after him. His manner was that of one who is taking a horribly unpleasant remedy, hoping to cure a still more horrible disease.

The diminutive Chinaman reached the bottom of the stairs and waited for his companion. When he felt the man's heavy hand on his shoulder, he turned to his right, advancing cautiously through an almost impenetrable darkness.

There was a smell of dry rot in this basement, and around their feet rats scampered and squeaked. The man's hand shook, and his breath came with a hissing sound through his clenched teeth.

"Now we go down again, master," the boy announced presently. He had paused and turned again to the right. "You keep close—I show you!"

A step at a time, they descended a second flight of stairs. On either side were rough stone walls, powdery with mildew. The man discovered this with his free left hand. Strange odors came to him. Abruptly a bell rang, somewhere in the bowels of the darkness below them.

The boy stopped in his tracks.

"Now you go down, master," he commanded. "Ah Wing waiting for you—you go slow. Goo'-by!"

He slipped out from under the heavy hand that would have detained him, and the man heard him go scampering like one of the rats up the stairs and away through the upper corridors.

Terror gripped the man left alone there on the stairs. He felt that he was in a trap—and he had been evading traps so long now that they had become an obsession with him.

He cried out, hoarsely, and as he did so a door opened below and a flood of light shone out.

"Pray continue your descent, Colonel Knight," a cultured voice commanded from somewhere within the lighted room whose door had just opened. "The stairs are quite secure, and I am awaiting you!"

With a plunge that hinted at desperation, the man addressed as "Colonel Knight" reached the bottom of the stairs and crossed to the door. He paused there for a moment, till his eyes adjusted themselves to the change in illumination. Then he stepped inside, and heard the heavy door close behind him.

The room he had entered was of considerable extent, but was almost destitute of furniture. There were bare walls, dusty with green mildew; and bare floors, covered with layers of dust and litter. There were two chairs, one of which was already occupied.

And as the newcomer's eyes rested on the occupant of that chair, all his doubts and fears returned to him. He had come to this unearthly spot to get away from almost certain death. Now he was not certain that the remedy would not prove worse than the disease.

The man sitting there, facing him, was dressed like a Chinaman, in silk trousers and coat, satin slippers, and black silk cap; but his eyes were of a metallic gray, and his high, thin-bridged nose spoke of Nordic blood. He would have been tall had he been standing. His hands were lying passive in his lap, but they were the hands of a man of great physical power.

And above all these details and beyond them was something the man in the ulster could not quite define—a radiation of power, as if the intellect and will of this strange being seated before him saturated the atmosphere of the empty room.

"Pray be seated, Colonel Knight!" the man in the chair said courteously. "I am glad to meet you. You have been recommended to me by a former student of mine—you know that I take only a few cases. It will be best for you to tell me your story, fully and accurately."

Colonel Knight lowered himself into the empty chair. His eyes still peered out through the gap in his collar, and seemed to be fastened on the face of the man before him.

Then, slowly and grudgingly he removed his cap and turned down his collar, disclosing the pouchy face of a man well advanced into middle age. It was a face suggesting daring and resourcefulness, this face of Colonel Knight; and for a few moments the two sat staring curiously at each other.

"I think I can condense that statement I have to make," the white man said finally. "I am a man of wealth. Five years ago, while traveling in Europe, I had the misfortune to attract the attention of the greatest gang of international thieves ever organized. Perhaps you have heard of them? They were called 'The Evening Wolves,' and were led by a man who called himself 'Count von Hondon'."

He paused for an instant to regard his companion curiously, but the Oriental merely bowed and sat impassively waiting.

"These men must have followed me about for some time before they struck. Finally they saw their chance. I was packed to leave Paris for Belgium, and they undoubtedly figured that I would have much of wealth with me.

"I did—but I had other things they had overlooked. I had my pistols, and I am a dead shot. I killed two of the robbers, and the rest fled. I supposed that would settle the matter, but I was mistaken. Five members of the gang were left alive, and they swore to be revenged upon me. They have followed me—"

A bell rang shrilly somewhere close at hand, and Colonel Knight leaped from his chair and looked wildly at his companion.

"What was that?" he cried. "That bell rang when I was descending the stairs—"

"Someone followed you here," the other replied, "and is now trying to reach us. Pray continue!"

"But that man upon the stairs—"

"We will come to him presently. Let me ask you to finish!"

"There is nothing more! I have been followed for years, and now a physical trouble is added—my physician tells me I am going blind. I can't see to run—"

The Chinaman eyed his companion deliberately.

"Why lie to me, my friend?" he demanded presently. "You come to me for help, and you wish to steal my ammunition! Now let me reconstruct your story for you. You yourself are 'Count von Hondon.' You were the leader of the master crooks called 'The Evening Wolves.' Five years ago you and your men made a rich haul, and you decided that a time had come to retire, or perhaps to go in by yourself. You departed,

taking with you the loot; and ever since it has been a running fight.

"Your old comrades could have shot you outright, but that would not restore to them the booty you stole. And you have not dared dispose of it, because it was the only thing that stood between you and death! You see, you can't lie to me. Every lie carries its trade-mark with it, to those who have eyes to see. Now I shall ask you but one question, and let me warn you—if you lie now, you will never leave this place alive!"

He stood up and thrust an accusing finger toward the cowering thief.

"Tell me," said the Chinaman, "the name of the person whom you and your men robbed!"

The beady eyes of Colonel Knight, or "Count von Hondon" as he had once been known in every capital in Europe, glittered with suspicion and fear. His breath caught in his throat, and he unfastened his collar with trembling fingers.

"The name," he said hoarsely, "was—was—"

Ah Wing crossed toward the heavy door and laid his hand upon the knob. His metallic eyes blazed, and he looked down with fierce contempt upon the man trembling before him.

"Will you answer?" he cried. "Or shall I open this door?"

"It was a woman!" Knight whimpered. "Her name was—Madame Celia—"

He broke off and stared at the Chinaman, towering there before the door. Ah Wing had neither spoken nor moved; but there was in the room a disturbance as if a great voice had shouted out a curse.

Slowly the Chinaman came back toward his visitor. His face now was the impassive face of a carved Buddha.

"Colenel Knight," he said gently, "the high gods have undoubtedly brought you to me. I am the only person in the world who can save you, for I work outside of the laws of men. And I will take your case, now that I fully understand it. But first I will ask you to show me the Resurrection Pendant which you stole from Madam Celia!"

The white man got slowly to his feet, his hands groping at his throat, his eyes protruding, his face the color of dough.

"The pendant!" he whispered through ashen lips. "The Resurrection Pendant! You know—you have heard?"

"Show me the Pendant," repeated Ah Wing inexorably. "I know that you brought it with you tonight, just as I know that you intended, in case I refused to take your case, to try to disappear without returning to your hotel. Show me the Pendant!"

With faltering hands and without removing his fearful eyes from the face of his companion, the crook reached inside his ulster and drew forth a package wrapped in brown paper. This he slowly unfastened, disclosing a jewel case. More and more slowly his fingers fumbled with the catch.

There came a sound from the door—a voice that seemed to have difficulty in filtering through the heavy panels.

"Come out of that, Count! We got you over a barrel! Come out—"

The massive door shook under a terrific blow, as from a sledge. The man in the ulster seemed about to crumple to the floor.

Ah Wing spoke coldly.

"Show me the Pendant!" he repeated. "They cannot break down that door, but if you trifle with me I will open it!"

With hurried fingers the terror-stricken crook threw back the cover of the jewel case, disclosing a mass of diamonds, intricately and skilfully assembled into a great pendant.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDER CHINATOWN

AH WING took a long stride, which brought him close to the man who held the jewel case.

The Oriental's steely eyes were fastened unwaveringly upon the pendant, whose history for half a century had ben transcribed in suffering and death. Misfortune had followed this unique assemblage of perfect stones: death and insanity; the breaking of friendships; the treachery of children toward parents; the murder of lover by lover. And now the mysterious Chinaman seemed to have fallen under the spell of the gems, for he was taking in every detail of their perfection.

For a moment the assault upon the door had ceased, but now it was continued. Heavy blows fell, and the walls of the subterranean apartment shook.

"It will not take your friends long to discover that they cannot reach us by that route," commented Ah Wing tranquilly, turning at last from his inspection of the Resurrection Pendant. "The door has a middle sheeting of boiler iron. It is bullet proof."

He reseated himself, motioning for Colonel Knight to do the same. Absently he watched the white man close the jewel case, wrap it carefully in brown paper, and return it to his ulster pocket.

"And now," continued the Chinaman, "I will ask you to tell me about these men. You say there are five of them? Please describe them to me, one at a time. Tell me all that you can remember as to physical and mental characteristics—I want every detail you can give me."

Colonel Knight sat down heavily. It was obvious that the assault upon the door was shaking his nerves so that he could hardly command his voice. His eyes were the eyes of some hunted thing, which sees itself at the end of a blind alley.

With an evident effort, he tore his glance from the quivering panels and fastened it on his companion.

"Yes," he said hollowly, "there are five of these men, and they have been chosen from the elite of the criminal world. I myself selected them and trained them. Each has his special ability. I will begin with the man whom I considered the brainiest of them all—the one who was almost my equal in planning and executing a really big robbery. His name is Monte Jerome."

Suddenly the blows on the door ceased; and the room was so still, after the ferocious assault, that it seemed to press on the ear drums of the speaker. He winced and for a moment was silent. Then, resolutely he continued:

"Monte is thirty-five years old. He is less than five feet six, but is broad shouldered and powerful. He grew up in the alleys of a large city. He fought his way to the leadership of gang after gang, and at the time I picked him up was looking for new worlds to conquer. I chose him because of four qualities: his physical strength; his native cunning; his lack of sentiment—or, as it is usually called, 'mercy'—and his absolute freedom from superstition. Monte believes in neither God, man, nor the devil. He was my right-hand man—and it is to his merciless pursuit that I owe my condition!"

Ah Wing had drawn a note-book from his pocket and was jotting down data. He glanced placidly toward the door, which was again shaking under a rain of heavy blows.

"Pray continue!" said he.

Something of the Chinaman's imperturbability was beginning to influence the white man. He went on with greater assurance:

"Next to Monte Jerome in total ability, I always placed the man we called 'Doc.' I never knew his real name. That was not important, as he went under many aliases. Doc was my means of approach to the wealthy men and women—and particularly the latter—upon whom I specialized. He is a university man, and has lived among people of wealth and refinement much of his life.

"He has brains, but lacks the quality of ruthlessness so important in really successful commercial crime. He is utterly selfish, I believe, but certain necessary factors in his profession are revolting to him—and he has never made the effort to put down this weakness. Physically he is prepossessing: an inch or two over six feet in height, blue eyes, light brown hair, splendid carriage; and possessed of the manners of a Chesterfield."

A thin, faint voice came through the door, upon which the tattoo had momentarily ceased:

"We've got you, Count! Open that door, or we'll gouge your eyes out when we break in!"

Ah Wing waved his hand affably toward the source of this ominous promise.

"And our friend out there?" said he. "Is he one of those whom you have described?"

"I was just coming to him," replied Colonel Knight, raising a shaking hand to his forehead and mopping off the beaded perspiration. "That is 'Billy the Strangler,' and I think the 'Kid' is with him. Those were my Apaches—my gun men—my killers. They are much alike. Both have cunning of a low order; and persistence—they are like bloodhounds, once they are put on the trail.

"They have been Monte's most useful tools in his pursuit of me. But both are superstitious, and their native bloodthirstiness has grown on them till they are little better than homicidal maniacs. The Strangler is tall and slim, with high cheek bones and lean arms which seem to be threaded with steel wires. The Kid is of medium height, with grey eyes and sandy hair."

The assault on the door had again been discontinued. Suddenly there came from directly overhead a sound of splintering boards, accompanied by a rain of dust and bits of plaster. Knight sprang up and retreated, snarling, toward a corner of the empty room.

"Ah, I have been waiting to see if your old comrades would think of that," he commented. "It gives us a line on their resourcefulness."

Colonel Knight regarded him with drawn lips, which exposed his yellow teeth.

"For God's sake, what are we to do?" he cried. "Are you armed? You sit there like a statue—"

"Pray continue your very interesting description," suggested Ah Wing. "There remains one of your band whom you have not described. I must know about him—and then I will deal with this other matter!"

For an instant the thief glared into the face of the man seated across from him. What he read there steadied him a little, although the crash of splintering boards from above told him that the men he had such good reason to fear were meeting with less resistance in this direction than they had encountered in their assault upon the door.

"There remains but one," he said hoarsely. "That is Louie Martin, my gem expert. Martin is one of the best judges of diamonds and pearls in the world. He is an expert in recutting and remounting stolen jewelry. And he has a wide acquaintance among the crooked dealers of this country and Europe—"

An extensive area of plaster broke away suddenly and crashed down, tumbling about the heads and shoulders of the two occupants of the room. At the same instant the end of a heavy gas-pipe crashed through the laths, and the voices of the men on the floor above were raised in a shout of ferocious triumph.

Ah Wing stood up deliberately and looked toward the ceiling. He seemed to be measuring the progress of the men opposed to him. Then, without hurrying he crossed the room toward a dimly lighted corner, where he stooped and opened a small door in the wall. This door was built in segments, like that of a safe; and was hinged with metal plates of enormous strength.

Colonel Knight, who cowered directly behind the Chinaman, felt a breath of cool, moist air, smelling strongly of earthy decay, blowing up from this diminutive doorway.

"Kindly precede me, Colonel," commanded Ah Wing. "Watch your step—the going is rather precipitous!"

Knight stooped and made his way through the opening. He found himself on a stairway which went steeply down into utter darkness.

A cloud of white dust filtered up into the light of the electric bulb; and, as Ah Wing stood watching, a lithe human figure landed with a crash on top of the heap of plaster and splintered boards and laths.

In the same instant the Chinaman passed silently through the small doorway, and his companion heard him slipping the bolts into place.

The darkness which had suddenly clutched them was so intense that it seemed to have physical substance. A squeaking sound from above brought Knight's face swiftly up. Something cold and reptilian flapped into his eyes and, with another *squeak*, was gone.

"Only a bat!" said Ah Wing softly. "Rest your hand on my shoulder and feel your way a step at a time. I will turn on my flashlight!"

A conical beam of light drilled through the darkness below them, and Ah Wing's companion saw that they were descending a narrow flight of stone steps that seemed to terminate in a panel of utter blackness. The walls on each side were damp; and pallid fungi had taken the place of the mildew of the cellars above.

"For God's sake, where are we?" the white man demanded through chattering teeth. "This looks like the shaft of a mine!"

"This is part of the underground system which made Chinatown famous, before the disaster of 1906," replied the Oriental. "Few white men have ever been down here—particularly of late years!"

He paused. They had reached a narrow landing, from which passages branched in half a dozen directions. Another descending stairway yawned ahead.

"If I were to leave you here," smiled Ah Wing, "you would never find your way out! You could not go back the way you have come, for there are acute-angled branches which would confuse you. Most of them end in masses of rubbish, easily dislodged by the unwary! But with me you are safe!"

His voice had an ominous softness. Knight followed down along the second flight of stairs. His heart was pounding. Suppose these crumbling walls should collapse! Suppose this unearthly being, in whose hands his safety lay, decided to rob him!

Ah Wing spoke abruptly:

"We have been following down the face of a hill. Now we reach the level, and here we leave these catacombs!"

He turned sharply to the left and led the way along a short passage which terminated in a second diminutive door. Ah Wing shot back the bolts and motioned for his companion to proceed him into the room beyond.

Knight obeyed. Daylight was there—white, blazing daylight! He blinked as he crept through the opening.

Next moment he tried to cry out. An arm had passed in front of his body, pinioning him. In the same instant a sinewy hand came close to his face, and there was a little tinkle of broken glass—a diminutive globule had been broken under his nose.

The thief struggled to turn his head aside, fought to keep from breathing in the stupefying fumes; but with a smothering gasp he surrendered.

He breathed deeply, and as he did so a sudden feeling of lightness and of expansion came upon him. In the act of wondering stupidly what this substance was that the Chinaman had forced upon him, his mind went blank.

Ah Wing continued for a moment to hold his hand over the mouth and nostrils of his victim. Then he carried Knight across the room and laid him on a divan. Turning deliberately, he pressed an electric button.

Somewhere in the brooding silence of the building, beyond this room, a deep throated bell rang clamorously.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EVENING WOLVES

HIGH in an apartment house, overlooking a street and something of the city, Monte Jerome, leader of the Evening Wolves, sat at his ease, a cigarette in the corner of his thin, merciless mouth, a telephone within reach.

From the back rooms of the apartment came the sound of heavy breathing, intermingled with an energetic and unmusical snore. Louie Martin, gem expert for the gang, and "Doc," their society specialist, were sleeping.

Monte listened critically to the heavy breathing. He was an expert in such matters, and his seasoned judgment told him that neither of his comrades was faking sleep.

With a nod of satisfaction, he stood up and walked soundlessly into the corridor connecting the rooms, stopping first in that occupied by "Doc," and then in the back room where Louie Martin was sleeping. In each room he paused long enough to make a thorough search of the clothing of the sleeping robber.

Monte went expeditiously through all the pockets, and even examined the linings. Just a little exhibition of the honor that obtains among thieves: Monte Jerome knew that his leadership depended on his ability to command his companions' unwilling respect, and he was taking no chances.

"I got a hunch Doc is thinking of ditching the gang, and going it for himself," Monte murmured as he returned toward the front room. "If he thinks—"

The 'phone bell rang suddenly, and the man on duty crossed to the instrument.

"Yes?" he said. . . . "Oh, hello, Billy. . . . What's that—Hell's bells! Got away! Get busy and find him—"

The voice of the Strangler came to him over the wire.

"Keep your shirt on, Chief!" it commanded. "You better come down here and see for yourself what we was up against!"

Two minutes later Monte was shaking Louie Martin awake.

"Come to life!" Monte grated. "The Count has made his getaway! You get into your clothes and tend 'phone! This is one hell of a mess!"

Martin climbed sluggishly and unwillingly out of bed.

"You've been running things," he snarled. "If you've got 'em in a mess, it's no one's fault but your own!"

AT A CORNER on the outskirts of Chinatown, Monte alighted from his taxi. This was a special machine, owned and operated by a crook who dealt indiscriminately in transportation, dope and bootleg whisky.

Monte commanded this worthy citizen to await his return, and plunged into a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys.

A shrill whistle sounded presently, and he saw the Strangler beckoning him from a doorway. Crossing over, Monte followed his henchman into an alley, down a flight of narrow stairs, and into an unlighted basement. Here they were joined by the "Kid," who carried an electric torch.

"Come on, Chief," the "Kid" commanded. "We'll show you first what we was up against—watch your step! If you stub your toe you'll land in hell!"

They turned and went down another stairway, narrower and steeper than the first. At the bottom their way was barred by a heavy door, studded with great iron bolts. In one place the wood had been battered away, disclosing the gleaming surface of a steel panel.

"We followed the Count here, and thought we had him cornered," the "Kid" drawled, rolling his cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other and regarding Monte through lazy, sardonic eyes. "When we saw we couldn't get through this way, we went up to the floor above and come at him through the ceiling. Come along—we'll show you!"

They went back up one flight of stairs and entered a room which evidently had long been unused. Its walls were crumbling, and in the middle a great hole had been torn in the floor. The Strangler, who was leading the way, crossed over to this opening and unhesitatingly disappeared through it. Next moment a yellow light filtered up through the opening.

"Down you go, Chief," commanded the "Kid." "This was the door we made!"

Monte made his way down through the opening, landing on the upper of two chairs which had been piled precariously together to assist in the descent. He was followed by the "Kid," and the three crooks stood examining the room in which Ah Wing and Colonel Knight had held their conference.

Monte spoke with a snarl.

"All right, you two!" he cried. "Here is where he was! Where is he now? Come across with your alibi!"

His two companions exchanged significant glances and the "Kid" took a slouching step closer to Monte.

"Look here, Chief," said he, "it ain't gonna be healthy for you to talk that way to me! I'm not spielin' no alibi. What I'm givin' you is straight goods, and you better get that twist out of your mush and act like a gentleman!"

He paused; and his two crumpled ears, which spoke of vicissitudes in the prize ring, grew red as a rooster's comb. His glassy gray eyes glared unblinkingly at Monte.

The latter was not afraid of either of these men, or of both of them together. Monte had the unflinching courage of the perfect animal. But he had no notion of breaking up a gang which might prove useful to him.

"All right, boys," he agreed, more pacifically, although his dark eyes continued to glow like coals. "If you can afford to take it easy, you got nothing on me! Tell me what happened."

"That's more like it," the "Kid" growled. "Now you're talking like a gentleman, Chief! Well, we follows the Count here, and thinks we has him holed up. We can't bust down that door—this is an old Chink gambling hell, and everything is stacked against a fellow that wants to get in. But we comes down through the roof—"

Suddenly the "Kid" paused. From somewhere behind there had come a sound as of the opening of a door. The eyes of his two companions followed his and together they stood, rigid and alert.

Slowly the back wall of the room opened out toward them. Unconsciously, the crooks shrank closer together. Their faces were drawn, their figures rigid.

The panel swung fully open, and a figure appeared in it. It was the form of a tall man, clad in black silk.

The three crooks stood staring at him silently. So unexpected had been his appearance that it had affected them with a sort of paralysis. Their mouths gaped open and their eyes bulged.

Serenely, the intruder stood looking down upon them; and then, with a courteous wave of his hand, he spoke.

"Pardon my intrusion, gentlemen!" said he. "My little affairs can wait—I will return later!"

He turned, and next moment the panel had swung silently shut behind him.

Monte Jerome was the first of the three to recover.

"Come on—we've got to get him!" he cried.

"That was the Chink we saw spieling with the Count," the "Kid" cried hoarsely. "But, for the love of cripe, how did he get here?"

Monte snarled wolfishly:

"Ask *him* that! We've got to bust through here—"

His compact body landed against the panel. It shook, but refused to yield.

"Come back here! Now, all together!" bellowed Monte.

The three leaped forward and struck the partition.

This time it swung inward, slowly and without a sound. The crooks leaped through the opening, and the "Kid" flashed his torch. They were standing just inside a vast, windowless room, at whose farther side they had a glimpse of sagging timbers and ruined walls. Nowhere was there a sign of the man who had eluded them.

"Get a move on!" Monte growled throatily. His lip drew up and he snarled at his companions: "A hell of a bunch of crooks, we are! Why didn't you take a shot at him, when you saw he was going to make a getaway?"

The "Kid" glared back.

"Cut out that kind of talk, Chief! You got a gat, and two hands! He buffaloed you just like he did us! Be a sport and take your medicine!"

A determined search of the ruined chamber yielded no results. The "Kid" dropped to his stomach and wormed his way under the mass of timbers at the farther side. He found the beginning of a stone-lined tunnel, which dipped abruptly into the earth.

Damp, mouldy air fanned his cheeks; and as he crouched, motionless, listening, a distant reverberation came to him from the bowels of the earth. It sounded like the clanking of a great iron door.

"Let me out of this!" he growled, as he backed toward his companions. "We got a fat chance of following that yellow devil into his hole. You go, if you want to!"

Monte shook his head. He had regained his poise, and he had been thinking.

"No use trying to follow," he admitted. "We got to comb Chinatown for the two of them. They can't live down in that burrow forever. But why did this duck show himself? He must have known we were here—he could hear us talking!"

The "Kid" smiled craftily.

"Maybe him and the Count left something," he suggested. "We better have a look!"

"No, they didn't leave nothing. I would have seen it if they had. I got an idea the Chink *wanted us to see him!* He stood there with his face turned into the light. Well, we got to find him! That's flat!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAN IN THE LIGHTED ROOM

THE WOLVES shifted their quarters that night to a rooming-house on the edge of Chinatown, and the search for Colonel Knight and his mysterious companion, the tall Chinaman, began.

For three days they worked feverishly. Monte Jerome seemed never to sleep, and his temper was not at all improved by the ordeal. He drove his companions fiercely, and only the fact that they were playing for big stakes prevented open rebellion.

On the fourth day Monte and the "Kid," who were loitering, alert but almost hopeless, in the entrance to a building in one of the narrow streets of the Oriental quarter, caught sight of a figure disappearing through a doorway. It was a tall figure, partly concealed by a light overcoat; but both of them leaped forward at the same instant.

"That was the Chink, sure as God made little red apples!" the "Kid" snapped.

They crossed the street. Several automobiles were drawn up close to the curb, among them a big blue limousine from which the Chinaman had stepped a moment before they identified him. Monte approached a well-dressed gentleman, who had just come out of the building, and asked him what was going on *inside.*

"This is the fall exhibition of the Iconoclasts," the stranger explained good-naturedly.

He seemed to be sizing up the two crooks.

"I think you boys would enjoy it," he added mischievously. "The admission is only fifty cents."

Monte and the "Kid" bought tickets, and presently they entered a big room with a high ceiling, upon whose walls were hung a number of gaudy paintings. The newcomers stared round at the fifty or more spectators who were making the rounds of the gallery.

"Hell!" growled the "Kid," "this ain't no place for an honest strongarm man—Let's beat it and send for Doc!"

Monte gripped his arm.

"Look!" he said under his breath. "Over there near the corner!"

The "Kid" looked stealthily as directed, and perceived the tall man in the gray topcoat. He was standing with his back to them, examining a red and yellow daub that looked like an omelette liberally seasoned with paprika.

"That's him!" Monte whispered. "All right, Kid! You have Mike bring the cab down to the corner where we was waiting. Then, when this duck beats it out of here, I'll hop in and we'll follow him!"

Half an hour later the tall man in the gray coat—who in American garb looked more like an Oriental than he had when dressed as a Chinaman—paused to look deliberately at his watch, and then turned to the outer door.

By the time he stepped into the blue limousine, Monte had reached the corner and was climbing in beside the driver of the taxi. The "Kid" had the window down, and was kneeling with his head close to the driver's.

"How 'bout it, Mike!" Monte demanded. "Can you keep 'em in sight?"

"Watch me!" snorted the driver. "There ain't no Chink going can leave me behind. Did you see that chauffer? Got a face like a monkey!"

There was no difficulty, for the present, in keeping the blue limousine in sight, however. It went sedately down a side street and took the turn toward the ferry. Five minutes later Monte and the Kid saw the cab in which they were seated draw in behind the larger car, and roll over the landing platform. The limousine was stationed on the right, and the cab on the left, of the big boat.

Monte scrambled down, and with a curt command to the other two made his way around to where he could see the enclosed car. The man in the gray overcoat was seated inside, with a coffee-brown Chinaman in livery at the wheel. Monte kept them in sight till the ferry was approaching the slip. Then he hurried back and climbed in again beside the driver.

"Here's where they'll try to leave us behind, if they have any idea we're following!" he predicted.

"Let 'em," growled Mike. "If we don't get took in by a speed cop, I won't never let no Chink drive away from me! You boys just hang onto your bonnets, and watch us!"

The big blue car seemed to have accepted this challenge. The little man at the wheel swung out and passed half a dozen slower machines, then took the center of the road and held it.

With the coming of evening, a powdery fog swooped down over the ridges to the west, and suddenly the tail lights of the limousine shot up in the gloom

ahead. Notch by notch, the Chinese chauffeur was adding to his speed. The lighter car behind bounced and swayed, and Mike spat through his teeth.

"Say, that bird must be clear nuts!" he growled. "If we get took in, they'll sentence us to about five life-times! What say, gents? Want to let him go?"

"You keep going!" snarled Monte, staring hardeyed into the fog. "If we get pinched, I pay for it, see? 'But don't you let that bird get away, if you want to sleep in your little bed tonight!"

Mike glanced sideways at the man whose elbow touched his. Something he saw in the stony face of Monte Jerome caused him to turn all his attention to the task in hand.

The tail lights had been growing dim, but now, slowly, the cab began to gain. Other cars, headed for the ferry, shot out of the fog and into it, honking warning horns at the crazily lurching machine that burned the road in pursuit of the blue limousine. The stony faces of the three men in the cab never deviated from their straight glare into the gloom ahead.

The speed of the big car was slackening. The driver of the cab grinned wryly.

"He knows the ropes. Speed cop in this burg ahead lies awake nights thinking up new ways of raising hell for speedy drivers," he explained. "Now we'll creep up on 'em a little more!"

They passed through the little town and again were in the open country. The limousine continued its more leisurely progress, however, and presently turned to the right into a dirt road. The cab dropped farther behind, at Monte's command.

"They can't get away from us on this road. Probably aren't going far, and we don't want them to spot us. Take it easy!"

The road seemed to be leading gently down, and presently they caught the gleam of water on each side. Rushes grew up close to the track; and from somewhere in the dusk the cry of a gull sounded like the wailing of a lost soul.

Involuntarily, the "Kid" shivered.

"Hell of a country!" he mumbled. "Where you reckon he's headed for?"

"Wait and see!" snapped Monte. "Hello!—he's turning in! That must be a private road! Stop here!"

He slid from the seat and stood swinging his feet alternately, to restore the circulation in them. Then he jerked his head into the darkness.

"Come on, Kid! We got to see what he's up to!"

The "Kid" clambered out, and the two crooks struck silently up the road. They reached the turn and found, as they had guessed, that they were at the entrance to a private road.

Instinctively, the two men paused and stared in through the trees. Night pressed thick and damp about them. A wind from the southeast brought to them the smell of the marshes, and once the booming whistle of a steamer sounded. In a lull of the wind, the gulls were screaming.

"This ain't in my line, Chief!" snarled the "Kid," glaring into the darkness. "I can bump a guy off under the city lights as nifty as the next one, but this nature stuff never did set right on my stomach. Let's go back!"

"You go back if you want to!" Monte said menacingly. "But if you do, don't come sniveling around me later on. I'm going in there!"

He struck off along the winding road, and in a moment the "Kid" fell into step at his side.

Without a word, the two advanced till suddenly the lights of a building shone upon them. They paused for a moment, then began to creep nearer, keeping in the shelter of clumps of bushes. In this way they came close enough to discern the outlines of a large and well-built house, with a broad frontage and two wings extending from the rear.

"For the love of cripe!" whispered the "Kid," "would you look at them windows! Barred, every damn one of them!"

Monte nodded.

"Looks like a private foolish house to me," he replied in the same cautious tone. "Come on—we'll get around behind and see what we can make out!"

The musty darkness of the night, which had settled down around them, was now an advantage, as it made it easieer for the two Wolves to get close to the house without being seen. They crept past the massive front, with its broad steps and wide porch, and continued till they came opposite the west wing. Most of the windows in this wing were dark, but toward the back they saw several lighted panels.

"Come on!" commanded Monte. "I hope that Chink doesn't keep a dog, but plug him if one comes at you!"

On they crept till they were close to the windows. Massive and sinister against the light, stood the iron bars which had first caught their attention. They crept closer, and finally Monte hauled himself up into a gnarly pepper tree whose lacy branches almost touched the nearest of the lighted windows.

Next moment he reached down and grasped his companion's shoulder.

"Come up here!" he grated, speaking half aloud in his excitement. "Don't slip—catch that limb! There you are!"

He assisted the "Kid" to a foothold beside himself, and together they stared through the foliage and into the lighted room beyond.

The curtains were drawn aside and the shade rolled up. Seated in full view of the two crooks was the man they had been following for five years. He wore a dressing-gown, and beside his easy chair was a low table on which rested a leather covered box.

Suddenly he turned, raised the cover of the box—and Monte and the "Kid" held their breath and stared hungrily. The light was caught and split up into a cascade of vivid colors. The man in the dressing-gown seemed to have in his clutching hands a fountain of fire.

"The Resurrection Pendant!" snarled the "Kid," reaching for his pistol. "Damn him!"

Monte gripped his companion by the wrist.

"None of that, you fool!" he hissed. "We've got to play safe—but the Count is caught in a trap! That Chink must have kidnapped him!"

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE OF AH WING'S DOOR KEEPERS

COLONEL KNIGHT awoke and lay staring at the ceiling. It seemed a surprisingly long distance from him—and then his glance narrowed.

He turned his head, and suddenly sat up in bed. He had just remembered the events preceding his loss of consciousness.

Ponderingly, he examined his surroundings. He was in a big room, with a high ceiling. There were two windows at his right and one straight ahead, the latter partly open. Several easy chairs, a handsome mahogany house desk, and a row of bookcases flanking a fireplace came to him as successive details of his environment. A bar of yellow sunlight streamed through the end window.

A door behind him opened, and he turned to see a grinning, brown-faced Chinese boy approaching his bedside, bearing a breakfast tray.

"Ah Wing say he coming to see you by-m-by," the newcomer commented placidly. "You hab breakfast now."

He drew up a table and placed the tray in position, then skillfully arranged napkin and silverware—which were of the best quality—convenient to Colonel Knight's hand. Afterward he withdrew.

Knight's head felt clear enough, but, mentally and physically, he was relaxed

to the point of incoherence. He wanted to think, but couldn't.

Mechanically, he lifted to his lips the cup of steaming coffee that the servant had poured for him. The taste of the hot, bitter fluid—he drank it without cream or sugar—helped him pull himself together. He remembered everything now: his visit to the mysterious Chinaman; the coming of his enemies, and their attack on the basement room; his flight with Ah Wing; and the latter's ruse for bringing Knight fully within his power.

Sharply he turned his head and looked again at the end window; it was barred with heavy iron rods, and so were the two windows at the side. This room in which he lay was a luxurious prison!

The door opened again, softly, and Colonel Knight turned his head to find Ah Wing advancing toward him, dressed in white flannel trousers, silk shirt, and serge coat. In such a rig the newcomer looked every inch a Chinaman.

"Good morning, Colonel," Ah Wing greeted his guest courteously. "I am glad to see you looking so fresh and rested this morning!"

Knight began to tremble.

"You yellow crook!" he croaked, his hands drawing up into knots. "So that was your scheme—to rob me, and then kidnap me? But don't think you can get away with it—"

Ah Wing approached the bed and deftly reached under the nearer of the two pillows. From this place of concealment he drew two things: the morocco jewel case, and a revolver that Knight remembered having carried in his inside coat pocket,

"Here are the principle articles of your property, Colonel Knight," said the master of the house. "The other things you will find after you are dressed."

He paused to watch the man in the bed open the leather box and stare hungrily at the flashing jewels. Then he continued:

"There was an ordeal ahead of you, my friend, and you were in no condition to go through with it. You needed rest, but your nerves were screwed up to the snapping point. There was only one way to get you safely out of the city, and I used it."

"You mean that the Wolves don't don't know where I am?" Knight demanded.

"Not yet. I shall remedy that presently."

Colonel Knight's voice rose into a snarl:

"Remedy it? You mean you want them to know?"

"Of course I want them to know. I want them here, where I can deal with them. But never fear, my friend. Your old enemies will never be able to hurt you!"

He paused and looked around the apartment, then turned again to the man in the bed.

"These are your quarters. Adjoining your bedroom is the bath. This door opens into your sitting-room, and adjoining that is my conservatory, which you are at liberty to visit when you choose. There are no conditions placed upon your residence here except that you are not to try to leave the house without my permission—*and you are to leave the end window exactly as it is.* Don't even lay your hand upon it, or upon the sill! This is important!"

Knight stared again at the single end window through which the sun was shining. He stared from it to the face of the strange being who continued to regard him with the impersonal interest of a Buddha. A sense of baffled curiosity arose within him, and he made a nervous, protesting movement with one of his puffy hands.

"Who the devil *are* you, anyway?" he broke out. "Ah Wing! That doesn't mean anything to me—as well say 'Mr. X!' You are not a Chinaman. What and who are you?"

Ah Wing continued to stare imperturbably down at his guest, but the ghost of a smile showed at the corners of his usually expressionless mouth.

"No," he agreed, "I am not a Chinaman. And I am not a Caucasian. You see that, dressed as I am today, I look unmistakably Oriental. Dressed like a man of Hong Kong, an the other hand, I look American or English. That has been my curse, and perhaps my blessing: the mixing of two irreconcilable blood lines has made me an outcast. I have no place in the government of any country, and therefore I have organized a government of my own.

"I am the emperor, the president, the king, of an invisible empire. I rule by right of intellect and will, and my first failure will be my death warrant; for, judged even by the standards of a thief like you, Colonel Knight, I am an outlaw—one who is outside the protection of the laws of men!"

He laughed, a short, mirthless laugh. As he crossed toward the door he said over his shoulder, "Remember about the window. I shall be going out from time to time, but if you carry out my instructions to the letter, no harm can come to you even in this house of hidden dangers."

Try as he would, Colonel Knight could find nothing wrong with his situation as it had been outlined to him by Ah Wing. He spent most of the first day in the room in which he had awakened. From the windows in one direction he could see a landscaped lawn and hillside, dotted with shrubbery and intersected by winding gravel paths.

From the rear window concerning which he had been so curiously warned by the master of the house, he looked out over a bit of lawn bordering a kitchen garden. Beyond the garden lay a marshy field, and in the distance he made out a canal along which an occasional motor boat chugged industriously. No, there was nothing wrong here—he could hardly have hoped for a more peaceful place in which to rest and grow strong.

But—there was an air of brooding watchfulness over the silent house. He heard an occasional padded footstep passing the door of his sitting-room. Once he looked out. At the farther side of an extensive conservatory the brown-faced servant who had brought him his breakfast was spraying some snaky-looking vines bearing huge orange-colored flowers. Colonel Knight closed the door. Something about the place—the quiet and the isolation, perhaps, were getting on his nerves.

The second day passed as the first, but toward noon of the third day Ah Wing knocked at his door and entered noiselessly. He was dressed in his Oriental garb, and again looked like a poorly-disguised white man.

"I will be going out for a few hours this afternoon, Colonel," he explained, regarding the man before him with his habitual unwinking stare. "I am taking Lim with me, and I think it will be best for you to remain in your quarters."

Although his words had taken the form of a request, there was back of them the force of a command. The white man eyed him suspiciously, but presently nodded.

Some time later he heard the *whir* of a starting motor. Lim had brought him his luncheon, and now Knight figured the house would be deserted. He smiled. This would be his opportunity to look around a bit. The instincts of the crook were strong within him, and he was immensely curious with regard to the house of Ah Wing.

He waited an hour after he had heard the car leave the garage—from the back window he had caught a glimpse of it: a gray roadster of moderate size and power. Now he felt sure that he would not be interrupted.

Crossing to the door of the conservatory, he passed into it. Along one side were orchids. Colonel Knight realized vaguely that the collection must be priceless. Many of them were growing in diminutive glass rooms, upon whose walls he saw heavy drops of moisture.

One pale green blossom near him had weird markings in white and yellow, which gave it a disturbing resemblance to a grinning human face. The man thrust out a curious finger and touched it: the blossom drew itself together like a conscious thing, and he became aware of a sickening perfume which in an instant turned him dizzy.

He shrank back and continued his journey. The concrete floor narrowed, and at his left he saw a lily pond, upon whose surface great white blossoms showed their buttery yellow centers. Between the pads and blossoms of the lilies the water showed, deep and dark.

Colonel Knight leaned forward to peer into the pool; then, with a choking cry he staggered back, his face drained of blood: an ugly black snout had shot up out of the murky depths, and a huge lizzard, with short, powerful forelegs armed with long claws, stared hungrily up at him.

He found his appetite for exploration losing its edge. He was tempted to turn back, but he wanted to settle one point: in case he should want to leave this house, how could he best do it? The windows were securely barred, but there must be plenty of doors.

A hall opened out from the conservatory, and on either side were rooms, variously furnished. He hurried on. Ahead, he saw a door which seemed to give upon the outer world. He grasped the knob. The door was locked, and the lock was one which a glance told him could be neither picked nor smashed.

Turning, he explored the rear of the house. In the east wing he found the kitchens and servants' quarters, but a door which probably communicated with the kitchen gardens was locked.

Suddenly his wandering eyes caught the handle of a door in an angle of the pantry. He approached it and found that it opened upon a stair leading down. A gust of warm, damp air came up through the stairway, and for a moment Knight paused, sniffing curiously.

He found himself thinking of a certain sultry afternoon in India, when he had gone out into the simmering jungle. There was the same wild smell here—

He had his revolver in his hip pocket. That gave him confidence, and he must know if it would be possible for him to escape in this direction.

A phrase spoken by Ah Wing came to him—"Even in this house of hidden dangers!" But what dangers could there be?

Colonel Knight felt his way down into the basement. He found that it lay almost entirely below the level of the grounds, but presently his eyes became accustomed to the dusk and he could discern his surroundings.

He was in a broad and deep room, filled with a litter of packing cases, discarded articles of furniture, and a few garden tools. At its farther side was a door. Slowly and cautiously, the investigator made his way toward this.

It opened into a dark and narrow passage. He made his way along this, trying the handles of two locked doors, one on the right and the other on the left. Then he came to the end of the passage and to another door.

Cautiously, he opened it and looked inside: before him lay a room somewhat better lighted than the passage, but absolutely destitute of furniture. He crossed the threshold and stood for a long moment looking about him. The smell which he had associated with that hot afternoon in the jungle came to him almost overpoweringly now, but beyond he saw a door with an iron-barred transom. He wanted to try that door.

He had crossed halfway toward it when some subtle sense of danger brought him to a stop. He looked back. Nothing.

Then, with a start, he looked up, into the dusky ceiling. Something was moving there—he stepped back, drawing in his breath with a sharp hissing intake of terror. He backed toward the door. It was taking shape, up there among some uncovered beams and pipes—a huge column that seemed to have come alive! Slowly it swung down in a great curve.

Colonel Knight stood frozen in his tracks. It was a snake—but such a snake! He knew that this was no waking vision, but a horrible reality—

With a choking cry, he turned and ran as he had never run before in his life. Behind him he heard a hissing as of sand being poured from an elevation into a tin pail. A box was overturned. The thing was gaining on him—he turned, and with bulging eyes he saw the python strung out along the floor, its great body undulating, its flat head raised, its unblinking eyes burning through the dusk.

He could never make the stairs. At the left was a small door. He threw himself upon it and clutched the handle—it came open and, without looking before him, he threw himself forward. Something struck against the door as he jerked it shut, and he could hear that uncanny sand blast louder than before.

Groping about him in the utter darkness of this refuge, he found a metal contrivance—a wheel, with a metal stem connecting it with a large iron pipe. He was in the closet which housed the intake of the water system.

Then he remembered his revolver. It would be of little use to him against the horrible thing coiled outside.

WHEN AH WING returned to the house, several hours later, he went quietly through the hall and conservatory to the door of Colonel Knight's apartment.

Satisfied by a brief inspection that his "guest" was not in his rooms, the Chinaman turned and made his way to the basement door. His face was as serene as usual, but his eyes shone with a metallic gleam. He opened the door and for a moment stood listening.

An angry and prolonged *hiss*, which sounded like a great jet of steam, came plainly to him. He stepped into the hallway and deliberately closed the door behind him. Then he felt his way down the stairs, pausing within a few steps of the bottom to look unwinkingly about.

Something was moving in the dim shadows at the farther side of the room. It came slowly toward him, and he could make out the undulating length of the python. Ah Wing's glowing eyes rested unwaveringly on the flat, evil head of the great snake, which came toward him more and more slowly.

With a final prolonged *hiss*, the python drew itself up into a huge coil. It was a tremendous creature, as large as a man's body at its greatest diameter: but now it seemed to be turning slowly to stone. Its beady eyes grew dull, and its swaying head became rigid.

A muffled cry reached the ears of the motionless Chinaman. Without the flicker of an eyelid, he continued to stare down at the python.

Presently he descended to the foot of the stairs. The snake was still.

Ah Wing crossed to the closet door and threw it open.

"You can leave your retreat now, Colonel Knight," he said. "My little playmate is temporarily in a condition of catalepsy—but I would not advise you to repeat this visit!"

CHAPTER SIX

LOUIE MARTIN LEARNS THE SECRET OF THE WINDOW

MONTE AND THE "KID" went back to the city that same evening, but early next morning the leader of the Wolves returned to the neighbor-

hood where they had picked up the trail of Colonel Knight.

Monte had caught sight of a "For Rent" sign in the upper window of a cottage half a mile from the big house, and he wasted no time in hunting up the rental agent and signing a lease. By evening he had his men with him, and the battle lines were established for the final conflict.

"We got to get all the dope on this Chink and his layout we can," Monte explained to his companions, as they sat smoking in the parlor of their new home. "We might try to rush the house, but I don't like the looks of it. Chances are that Chink's got a machine gun or a bunch of sawed-off pump guns there. We'll have to size things up."

He paused to stare at his men.

"Any kicks on that? All right, it's settled. Louie, it's your turn for sentry duty, and you better get over to the Chink's castle now. At two o'clock I'll send Doc over to relieve you. You might take a look at the windows, and see if any of them can be handled without a saw—there may be some loose bars!"

Louie Martin, the gem expert, was a little tallow-faced man with a straggling, peaked beard and shifty eyes. He had no real appetite for this sort of thing, but for personal reasons he was more willing than usual to go on duty tonight.

Slipping his automatic into the holster under his arm, he struck off along the road toward the house of Ah Wing, whose gables were visible from the cottage. A light wind was blowing from the southeast, and he could see the mist rising over the marshes. Somewhere from the steamy air above a night heron screamed raucously. Involuntarily, Louie shivered.

He was glad to turn his thoughts to his own immediate affairs. Louie Martin had made up his mind to strike out for himself. He had always admired Colonel Knight—or "Count von Hondon"—for the shrewd stroke of business he had done; and Louie was keen enough to perceive that Monte Jerome was not equal to the task of holding the Wolves together. At the present time there was open dissension among them. One of these days one of them would squeal on the others—that was the way this mob stuff usually ended.

No, Louie had made up his mind to watch his chance for a crack at the jewels—and then a clean getaway.

He reached the private road leading to the Chinaman's house, paused for a moment to listen and reconnoiter, then stealthily struck into the grounds. Five minutes later he had skirted the west wing and was peering up through the shrubbery at the lighted windows of Colonel Knight's apartment. Their location had been sketched for him by Monte.

"So that's where the old devil is!" thought Louie. "Let's just have a look-see!"

He climbed into a pepper tree—the same from which Monte and the "Kid" had seen Knight—and stared into the room. It was lighted, but there was no one in sight. Then, through a vista of open doors, he saw the man whom he had been sent to watch, walking slowly about with his hands clasped behind him, a cigar between his lips.

"Had a good supper, and now he's enjoying a smoke!" Louie mumbled enviously. "Well, that's good enough for me, too! Let's have a look at that window!"

He slipped down from the tree and glanced about. At the corner of the house was a galvanized iron can, evidently used for lawn clippings. Louie lifted this cautiously and carried it over under the end window. Then he climbed upon it, raising his head cautiously till he was standing just beside the half-open window.

A silent inspection of the bars showed him that they were all securely fastened, with one possible exception: the bottom bar seemed to be loose in its niche. Louie climbed down, changed the can over to the opposite side, and examined the opposite end. Sure enough, it showed a crumble of concrete around the bolt which was supposed to hold it in place. With the utmost caution, fearing that the loose bar might be connected with an alarm system, the crook tested it.

A smile twisted his thin lips. It could be moved in and out of its niche.

A sound came from somewhere close at hand; and with the speed and silence of a wolf Louie Martin leaped to the ground, caught up the can, and replaced it where he had found it. Next instant he was hidden in a clump of flowering shrubs.

From this position he could see the top of a flight of steps leading down to the basement of the house of Ah Wing. He stood listening and watching, and presently he heard a door open and close, followed by steps ascending the stairs. Then some one came up out of the basement, and he saw the figure of a tall Chinaman walking deliberately toward the bush in which he was hiding. Louie reached under his coat for his pistol—

Ah Wing turned, and Louie saw that he was following a graveled path. And he was carrying something in one hand—a contrivance of twisted wires, like an iron basket.

As Ah Wing disappeared into the mist, Louie made up his mind. Tonight, after Knight had gone to bed, he would strike: he was not to be relieved till two o'clock, and that would give him time to put through his coup. But now he meant to follow Ah Wing. He needed all the information he could secure about the master of this silent house.

The Chinaman had disappeared into the eddying mist, but Louie struck into the path and soon came within hearing of the crisp footsteps. Ah Wing reached the edge of the grounds and crossed over into a marshy field.

Instinctively, the crook worked closer to the man he was shadowing. There was something oddly menacing about this night, with its mist and its fitful, salt-laden wind.

Suddenly through the swirling fog there appeared a light, which seemed to be suspended ten feet or so above the ground. It was moving slowly along in front of them—a murky light, like a blood-red mist.

Then Louie saw that it was the light suspended from the mast of a boat, and that the boat itself was moving slowly along before them, almost hidden by the banks of the canal. The tide must be out, he thought.

Ah Wing swung on through the night, and presently the man following him made out the silhouette of a building, perched above the canal. Louie slunk cautiously forward and saw that the boat, whose lantern he had previously observed, was making fast at that wharf.

Ah Wing leaped lightly to the sunken deck and disappeared down the companionway. Before Louie could decide what he was to do, the Chinaman reappeared and climbed back to the wharf. Louie had just time to slip into the shelter of a group of piling when the Chinaman passed the corner of the building.

And in his hand was another of the wire contrivances, filled with squirming, squeaking rats!

The white man felt his stomach doing queer antics. He had heard of Chinamen eating rats. Was that what this fellow was up to? What else could he want with them?

Ah Wing walked swiftly, and the man behind kept as close as he dared. Again they entered the grounds surrounding the big house, and the Oriental crossed to the basement stairs and went down. Louie paused in the bushes.

"I'm going to gamble," he whispered suddenly to himself. "I'll just sneak down those steps, and if he tries to come

out before I can duck, I'll bean him! I want to know what he's up to!"

Stealthily, he approached the steps. All that he could see was a murky hole, into which the cement stairs disappeared. A step at a time he made his way down—

And then he paused, holding himself bent forward, rigid as a man of stone. From beyond the door which opened out of this pit came a strange sound, the like of which he had never before heard. It was like a jet of steam, or like sand sifting into a tin pail from a considerable height.

Then came another sound—the singsong voice of the Chinaman, crooning something in a rhythmic chant. Louie could not understand the words, but there was a swing and lilt to the thing that had a curious effect on him: *he felt as if he were being rocked to sleep.*

He threw off this mood with a start. There had come another sound—the squealing of many rats. And there was a grating noise, as if a heavy body were dragging itself about the floor. The rat chorus swelled. The creatures evidently had been turned loose, and were racing about the floor in an agony of terror.

The chorus thinned. Something was happening to them. Presently the last of the rats emitted one long, agonized squeal, and was still.

Louie Martin made his way out of the cellarway and hurried dizzily back to the shelter of the bushes. He didn't know what had been happening behind that horrible door, but he knew that it was something which turned his flesh to ice. A strange smell had come to him from under the door—

Louie noted with relief that the lights in Colonel Knight's rooms had been snapped off. That meant that the Colonel had gone to bed. Soon he would be sleeping, and then Louie could put his plan into execution—that would enable him to forget this baffling but vaguely horrible experience.

Somehow, he felt as if great unseen creatures were flying about him, striking at him with black, featherless wings. The air seemed to be in motion.

He caught himself firmly.

"Got to cut it out!" he mumbled under his breath. "Getting dippy! Likely to bite somebody! Got to think about something else!"

He began to think about the jewels; and then his mind shifted, and he was thinking of the woman from whom he and his companions had stolen the pendant. She had been called "Mother of the Friendless." The jewels had been given to her by a rich patron, to assist in the work of providing for the many who were dependent on her for charity.

The wolves had done a clever bit of work that time. They had caught the jewels while they were in process of transfer from the original owner to the old woman—

Another tangent. Louie was thinking with cold amusement of the fate of Madam Celia, the "Mother of the Friendless." Luck had turned against her, with the loss of the jewels. Others who had helped her in her earlier years had turned away after that—as if the old woman had suffered contamination by accepting this gift, bequeathed by a certain rather notorious beauty whose affairs had upset thrones and dynasties.

Yes, a very good joke on the old woman. And she had died in abject poverty. That was the way that sort of thing went, Louie realized. One was really a fool to do anything for anyone but one's self.

A sound came through the half-open window of Colonel Knight's suite—and again Louie Martin grinned. The master crook, who had stolen the jewels from the "Mother of the Friendless," was now about to pass them on—only he didn't know it!

Louie brought the metal barrel over under the window and set it, bottom up, so as to form a secure means of approach to the room beyond. He had thrown off his depression now. But he must work fast.

Cautiously, he stepped upon the barrel and raised his hands to the bottom bar. Twisting it slowly and at the same time pulling, he drew both bar and bolts from their sockets and tossed them to the ground. He wanted to laugh! So this was the wisdom of a Chinaman? He might have known!

There was a stone coping a couple of feet above the top of the thing on which he stood. Louie rested his foot on this coping and laid his hands on the sill. Lightly he drew himself up against the face of the wall.

He paused to listen. The man within was breathing heavily and regularly.

Louie thrust his head through the opening—nothing in sight to alarm him. Then, with a quick spring, he threw his weight upon the sill and was half-way through the window—

Half-way, but no farther; for as his weight descended fully upon the sill, the upper sash crashed down like the lever of a great engine. The thief cried out once, a hideous, choking cry that echoed through the room and on into the house of Ah Wing.

Then he was silent, drooping there like one who has been broken on the wheel. Blood dripped from his mouth and nostrils, and he had ceased to breathe. He was caught like a huge rat in a trap!

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS

SOMEWHERE BEYOND the mist-enshrouded marshes the whistle of a grain ship boomed, to be answered a moment later by the metallic scream of a siren. Vague and mysterious filaments of sound drifted in with the eddying night wind.

"Damn such a country!" the "Kid" snarled, as he turned from the door and tramped back into the house. "How long you going to keep us rusticating out here, Chief? I'm fed up on nature!"

Monte Jerome scowled at his assistant.

"We're going to stay here till we get what we came for!" he replied. "If Martin doesn't show up by morning, we got to decide what he's up to!"

An uncanny silence gripped the four Wolves. Nearly twenty-four hours had passed since Louie Martin went on duty, and nothing had been heard from him. An uncomfortable idea was developing in the minds of the various members of the "mob."

Suddenly the "Kid" voiced this general suspicion. With a snarl, he pointed accusingly at Monte.

"Fact is, Louie ain't coming back, Chief, and you know it! He's grabbed something—maybe the sparklers—and he's beat it. Don't blame him a damn bit, neither. We're going to set around here with our mouths open till the dicks get after us. But Louie ain't coming back, and you just put that down in your note-book!"

Monte turned toward the speaker.

"Is that your opinion, you lump-head? Well, keep it till I ask you for it. The trouble with you is you've been thinking of cutting loose, yourself. Louie will show up all right. Don't you worry about him."

"Hell of a lot you know about it!" mumbled the "Kid" angrily.

Monte walked slowly toward him, his eyes blazing.

"Trying to start something?" he demanded. "If you are—"

The Strangler intervened at this critical moment. He and the "Kid" had had a disagreement earlier in the evening when the latter moved into the room left vacant by Louie Martin's unexplained absence. This was a ground-floor room with an abundance of light and sun, and the "Kid," with a loose-lipped grin, announced that his doctor had told him he ought to have it. The Strangler had protested; but the "Kid"

had possession, and made it plain that he meant to hang on.

Now the Strangler sided maliciously with Monte.

"You're always belly-aching about something, Kid," he declared. "You better lay off and give us a rest. The Chief knows what he is doing!"

Monte paused, thankful for this opportune intervention. He had made up his mind to square account with the "Kid" just as soon as the real business which held them together was finished, but a show-down now would be dangerous to the success of the larger affair.

"Let's cut it all out, boys!" he suggested pacifically. "I'll go on duty up to two o'clock. Doc, you set the alarm. You'll relieve me. I'll try to find out something—that Chink may have grabbed Louie. We ought to know what has happened before we pull anything!"

He nodded to the others and left the house. The three crooks settled down to their usual evening: the "Kid" got out a deck of cards and began to play a one-handed game of his own devising; Billy the Strangler drew his chair over in front of the fireplace and adjusted his feet on the mantle—in this position he would smoke and stare into the coals till he grew sleepy—and "Doc" took from the table an illustrated magazine and turned to the serial he was reading. Occasionally he glanced covertly at one of his companions: "Doc" sensed the coming battle between these two gunmen, and had no intention of being caught within the firing lines.

The wind freshened, and they could hear it wailing around the house and through the upper windows. The window in the "Kid's" room rattled and banged, and he looked abstractedly up.

"Hell of a night!" he mumbled. "Sounds like all the dead men in this neck of the woods was hanging around outside, wheezing to be took in by the fire! Listen to that window rattle!"

The Strangler smoked on imperturbably.

From somewhere in the house above there came a sound—low and uncertain at first, then rising to a sort of scream. The "Kid" threw down his cards and staggered to his feet. The Strangler hauled his long legs down from the mantle and reached under his coat for the handle of his automatic. "Doc" turned pale—he was too sophisticated to be superstitious, but this unearthly cry was a fact rather than a theory.

"What the devil was that?" the "Kid" demanded hoarsely. "Say, if that was one of them birds—"

"That must have been it!" "Doc" decided aloud. "A night heron, blown against the chimney! What a night to be out in!"

He shivered and picked up his magazine, but the zest had gone out of his reading. From the corners of his eyes he observed that the "Kid" was gathering up his cards, and that Billy had not again elevated his feet to the mantle.

"Well, I guess I'll be going to *my* room," the "Kid" drawled presently, emphasizing the possessive pronoun to tantalize the Strangler. "Kind of feel like a little snooze would take the wrinkles out of my brains. This place sure does give me the willies!"

He slouched into the hall communicating with the back rooms—a kitchen and his bedroom—and they heard him shuffling through the darkness. Following a moment of silence, his voice sounded in a steady mumble. Then it was raised in expostulation.

"Who the hell has been fooling with my light? It won't turn on!"

Another brife interval of silence, then a bellow of rage and fear from the man in the back bedroom.

"Who's there? Go way from me! Damn—"

They leaped up at the sound of the "Kid's" stumbling gallop. He burst into the room, and they saw that his face was the color of ashes.

"For God's sake, who's in that room—my room?" he cried, staring at them through straining, glassy eyes. "Come on, you fellows! Here, I'll take a flashlight—the globe must be burned out!"

He snatched up an electric torch and led the way back through the hall, the Strangler at his shoulder, "Doc" some distance behind.

"Someone let out a groan when I went inside the door," the "Kid" was explaining. "And then he says right in my ear, 'This ain't your room, Kid!' Listen!"

They were within five feet of the bedroom door when the "Kid" paused and held up a trembling hand. He was directing the light of the torch upon the doorway. And at that moment there came from it a groan, followed by a muttered protest.

"My room!" a voice within the room said distinctly.

"Holy Mother!" whispered the Strangler. "That sounds like Louie! He must be hurt!"

"How in hell would he get in there?" protested the "Kid." "Come on—let's see!"

They stepped inside the room, and the ray of the flashlight began to circle it. Suddenly the circling beam came to a stop.

"In the bed!" gasped the "Kid." "He's there, covered up!"

Slowly and unwillingly, an inch at a time as if drawn by some irresistible force, the three Wolves crossed the room and approached the bed. They could all see the huddled form lying there, covered even to the face. There was something about it—an utter absence of motion—that terrified them. But they could not turn back.

The "Kid" reached the bedside and for a long moment stood glaring down. Then, with shaking fingers, he caught the edge of the bedding and threw it back.

In the concentrated light of the lantern, there stared up at them the livid face of Louie Martin. His glazed eyes protruded, and there was a trickle of blood running from his nostril to the left corner of his mouth. And in his face was an expression of frozen horror which stopped the hearts even of the hardened crooks who looked down in momentary paralysis.

With a scream, the "Kid" dropped the lantern and turned, treading upon the toes of the Strangler. Another scream sounded, high and shrill—it came from the direction of the bed.

"Why can't you let me rest?" a quavering voice protested. "This is my room—"

They heard no more. The three swore and sobbed as they raced for the front room. They slammed doors behind them, and brought up, shaking as if in ague, directly under the big, brilliantly lighted chandelier.

"Somebody bumped him off—and he came back to tell us about it!" the "Kid" whispered.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AH WING LISTENS IN

"HE'S CERTAINLY good and dead!" Monte said, as he stood looking down at the body of Louie Martin. "Whatever they did to him, it was a plenty! But you boys must be a little bilious—you can see for yourselves that he hasn't been doing any talking for some time. What you heard was the wind, blowing around the corners of the house!"

The "Kid" drew the back of his hand across his glistening forehead. He was standing near the door.

"Don't kid yourself, Chief!" he snarled. "We heard him talk—all of us did! And there's another thing: us being bilious wouldn't account for Louie Martin walking in on us here, and climbing into that bed!"

Monte was staring down at the dead man.

"You say you heard the windows back here rattling earlier in the evening?" he demanded.

"Sure. Why wouldn't they? The whole house was rattling!"

Monte nodded. He had his own ideas on this subject, but he didn't intend to spread them before his already demoralized followers.

"Well, the thing we've got to decide is what we're going to do with him," he commented. "We've got to handle the whole business ourselves, and say nothing. We can't afford to have the dicks asking questions around here just now!"

Tacitly, Monte's three companions agreed, but there was in their pale faces a question which none of them had the courage to voice. Monte continued, apparently unconscious of their emotions.

"Billy," he said, "you get the spade and dig a grave over close to the fence. After we get him planted, we'll move that pile of old bean poles over the place. It's kind of tough, but Louie is dead—and we got to look out for ourselves!"

The Strangler went silently out into the dark. They heard him rummaging for a spade, and presently the *clink* of the latter implement came industriously to them. The grave was finished by the time the first gray light of dawn began to filter down around the cottage, and presently the body of the dead crook, wrapped in a blanket, was lowered into it. Then the dirt was shoveled back till the cavity would hold no more, and the superfluous earth was scattered over the surface of the garden. The shifting of a pile of bean poles finished the ceremony.

"I'll trade rooms with you, Kid," Monte said to the saturnine strong-arm man—who for once looked rather cowed. "I never was afraid of a dead man—just so that he was really dead. I guess you're kind of soured on that part of the house!"

"Soured is right," mumbled the "Kid." "Say, I wouldn't sleep in there if you was to give me all the sparklers in New York! Just let me get my stuff out!"

As he went back toward the room from which the body had recently been removed, the "Kid" saw the mocking glance of the Strangler fastened upon him. Billy was enjoying his discomfiture. He went into the room and turned on the light—the burned-out bulb had been replaced, so that now he was able to see into all the corners. He began to gather up his property, staring nervously about him the while.

Cautiously, he approached the closet, where he had stored his bathrobe and an extra suit, a couple of pairs of shoes and a pearl gray hat. He opened the door wide and stepped back. Nothing inside. Hastily he carted the clothing out. Then he crossed over to the bureau and opened the left-hand upper drawer, in which he had placed his jewelry—some rings and tie pins.

The "Kid" drew the drawer fully open and stood looking down into it. Then a startled exclamation escaped him, and he bent nearer, staring wide-eyed.

All of his possessions were there; but in addition he saw, close to the back of the drawer, a morocco covered box of peculiar design. The "Kid" had seen that box once before!

With trembling fingers he undid the clasp and opened the lid. He could feel his heart pounding in the top of his head, and his throat seemed to contract, so that he fought for breath. The Resurrection Pendant! A single glance convinced him of that. But how had it come into this drawer?

The "Kid's" mind deviated from the line of this natural inquiry. He could forget that for the moment—the fact was that here it was. But there was no reason why he should share this discovery with the other Wolves. This supreme good fortune had come to him, not to them! He quickly shut the lid of the case and slid the box into an inside pocket.

He removed his property to Monte's room, hiding the jewel case under the mattress. His blood had turned to liquid fire. He had that for which they had all been searching—and it was his alone! . . .

Monte went on guard that evening, taking "Doc" with him: not that Monte was afraid, but he realized that the battle had now entered its final and decisive phase. And it was real war. Monte Jerome had no doubt that Martin had, in some mysterious way, been done to death in the house of Ah Wing.

"You boys better get to bed early," he said. "Billy, you take the clock and set it for half past one. You wake the Kid as soon as you get up—we'll stand double guard from now on!"

The "Kid" hardly heard Monte speaking. He wanted to examine the jewels again, wanted to figure out just how he was going to make the break which would free him from his comrades.

For a time, after the other two had departed, he sat around smoking and cleaning out the barrel of his pistol, which the fogs of this marshy neighborhood were corroding. He cleaned barrel and chamber and oiled the action, then replaced the clip of cartridges and slipped the gun into a side pocket.

"Well," he mumbled, half aloud, "I guess I'll be getting to bed. An' I hope to God there won't be no voices around here tonight!"

The Strangler grunted, and the "Kid" slouched off up the stairs and into the room that had been Monte's. He closed the door carefully, crossed over to the light, and then stood listening.

The night wind was stirring around the house, whistling and moaning down the chimney; but the "Kid" had an antidote for fear tonight: he went over to his bed and fumbled for the jewels. The touch of the smooth leather-covered box started his heart to pounding.

He laid the box on the bed and opened it. The light was reflected into his eyes from a thousand sharp facets, crimson and blue and white—but perhaps the charm was wearing off: the stones did not look as wonderful to him tonight as they had in that momentary view he had caught during the afternoon.

"And that's the bunch of sparklers men go dippy about!" the "Kid" mumbled. "Hell, I wouldn't give two bits for the whole bunch, if I couldn't sell 'em! There's too many of 'em, and they don't shine so terrible much! I saw a big buck nigger on State Street once with a solitaire on that would have made them look phoney—and it was glass! Oh, well, I should worry. I ain't going to wear 'em—I'm going to *sell* 'em! I'll have to play safe—"

At the ghost of a sound from behind, the "Kid" whirled. He had left the door closed, but now it was open—and the Strangler stood inside the room, grinning.

"So, that was the game!" he cried. "You're a slick one, Kid, but you ain't slick enough. I been watching you all evening. You ain't yourself, old timer. You're getting nervous. But I don't wonder! You grabbed the sparklers, but how you done it I don't know. And you was going to hold 'em out, was you? Well, well—"

The "Kid's" lips jerked up into a wolfish smile, but he forced himself to go slow. He needed to think this thing out. He knew the Wolves well enough to be sure they would hold this affair against him, and sooner or later would try to play even. No use to try to explain—they wouldn't understand.

The Strangler was watching him through chilly eyes. Casually, the Kid's hand stole toward his side pocket. Instantly the man standing before him

acted: with a bellow of rage he jerked out his own hand, which he had been holding under his coat: swinging it up he fired, then struck at the light globe with the smoking barrel.

To the "Kid" there came the sensation of suffocation and of darkness. His own gun was out, but his enemy had disappeared—and he himself was sprawled across the bed. That instant of falling had not registered in his consciousness: he had been standing, and now he was down; that was all he knew.

And he was fighting for breath—a great weight seemed to be crushing in his chest. He raised his left hand and gropingly explored the front of his shirt: it was already saturated, and from a hole to the left of his breast bone more blood was coming in a pulsing current.

"The dirty dog!" muttered the "Kid" thickly, pulling himself erect by grasping the foot of the bed. "He's croaked me—"

Then suddenly the "Kid's" whirling senses cleared. Billy the Strangler had done for him; but he would send Billy on ahead, to tell St. Peter he was coming! His yellow teeth came together. He felt something welling up in his throat and spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Not—much—time—left!" he muttered.

He dropped to his knees and for a moment everything went blank. Then he mastered himself, by a superhuman effort: and began to crawl stealthily along toward the dimly-lighted panel of the door. The Strangler had run out there after firing—now, undoubtedly, he was waiting till it should be safe for him to come back for his booty!

Slowly, the dying crook dragged himself across to the door and out into the hall. The training of a lifetime stood him in good stead now: he was as soundless as a shadow. He reached the top of the stairs and paused, leaning for a moment against the banisters—everything was going black before him. Then he pulled himself together with a disregard for his own suffering that in a better cause would have been heroic.

Inch by inch, he drew himself forward till he was sitting on the top step of the stair. He peered down into the lighted rooms below. Ah! There he was! The Strangler stood beyond the big chandelier in the front room, the "Kid" could see him plainly through an open door. His face was smiling, the crooked smile of a shark.

Resting his automatic across his bent knees, the "Kid" took steady aim at the man who had done for him.

"A little higher than the pockets!" he told himself, repeating the old gunman's formula for a killing shot.

Next moment the pistol roared; and the man standing down there in the light jerked up his hands and staggered backward. Greedily, the "Kid's" fast glazing eyes drank in every detail of the Strangler's agony. He knew what that look meant—

Billy the Strangler began to pivot on his heels, staring with blind eyes into space.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Damn your soul and body—you—"

He pitched forward to his face. And the "Kid," leaning peacefully back, felt himself snatched up into a great red cloud that has descended out of the roof upon him.

IN AN upper room in the house of Ah Wing, the Chinaman sat at an instrument that resembled a telephone switchboard. There were on its surface eight little globes, each with a plug socket beneath.

Ah Wing had an operator's head-piece in position, and he seemed to be listening attentively to something that came to him over the wires.

There had been voices, loud and angry. He heard the Strangler denouncing the "Kid." Then came the shot—and silence.

Ah Wing waited an appreciable time, then shifted the plug from socket to socket. Not a sound from any of the rooms in the distant cottage. He returned the plug to its central position and waited.

Presently another shot sounded, and a scream. He heard the Strangler curse his enemy.

Without a word, Ah Wing removed the head-piece and glanced up at a chart fastened to the wall before him. It contained the names of five men, against one of which a black cross had been inscribed.

Now he picked up a pencil and filled in two additional crosses.

There were but two of the Wolves left!

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A WEIRD adventure befell Mrs. Rafaela Mercurio, an Omaha woman who, after apparently dying, awoke in the land of the living instead of the spirit world. After her physician had pronounced her dead, her life was restored by an injection of adrenalin, administered by Dr. W. A. Gerrie.

To all outward appearance, she was quite dead. There was no indication of breathing or heart action. Prayers for the dead were started in the bed chamber where her body lay.

Then Dr. Gerrie injected the gland extract in her heart, and after several days she showed signs of returning life. Upon regaining consciousness, she was confused and puzzled, uncertain, it seemed, whether she was alive or dead. Later she described her strange experience.

"I could feel death pulling me," she said. "I was slipping. I tried to find something to hold to, but could not. I felt far away and alone, yet it seemed there was something I must do before I slipped entirely away.

"I had just a few minutes. I must straighten out in bed. I must cross my hands on my breast. I must smile. My children must know that I died in peace. From far away there seemed to be people around me. But their voices grew more distant.

"Then there seemed to come to me the comforting words of a priest. They added to my peace and content. I was ready for death. I smiled, I think. I know I wanted to. It was the last thing I remember."

And then, days after the first injection of adrenalin, the "dead" woman regained consciousness. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

"I shall never forget that hour," she said. "I heard the clock strike four times—and I realized I was a living person in a living world."

A Fanciful Novel of the Red Desert
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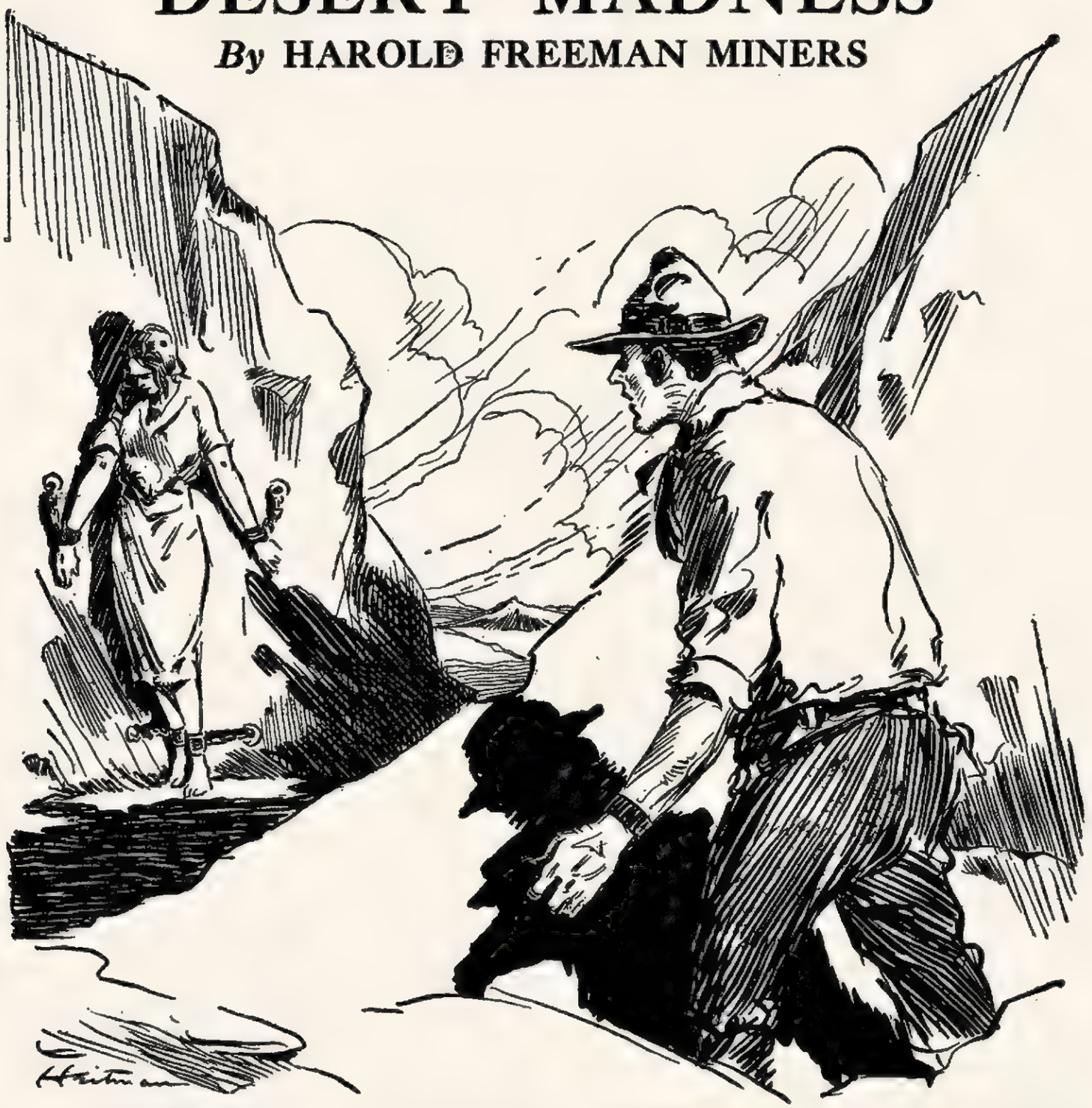
DESERT MADNESS

By HAROLD FREEMAN MINERS



CHAPTER ONE

THE GIRL AND THE HANDCUFFS

FOR A LONG MOMENT the man surveyed with tired eyes the queer cleft in the canon wall and the beaten trail that led into it.

Finally he addressed the nearest of his two burros in a listless, half humorous voice:

"Well, Archibald, it looks interesting—what say we try it?"

Archibald made no reply. Archibald was asleep. Immediately upon the halting of the little cavalcade the burro had sunk into a state of dejection more apathetic than usual and had promptly gone to sleep. In fact, it is doubtful if Archibald had not been asleep the greater part of the afternoon.

"You don't care, eh, Archibald? Well, for that matter, neither do I. But let's consider this matter, old timer. For the last hundred years, more or less, we've been strolling around this accursed desert, and we have made the acquaintance of a few cottontail rabbits, one or two coyotes, and a rattlesnake. The rabbits showed their distaste for our society by running away; the coyotes did noth-

ing but deride us with mournful voices; the rattlesnake certainly showed no desire to be friendly. We've met no human being; we've discovered no fabulously rich gold mine; we've had our fill of scenery.

"There lies a well-beaten trail, disappearing into the face of solid rock. At its end lies mystery, adventure. Possibly romance. Also, possibly, cattle rustlers, who may greet us with anything but enthusiasm. In which case we'll throw in our lot with them, and I'll ride you across the desert to eternal glory. The idea intrigues me, Archibald. I think we shall investigate."

At this moment an over-industrious flea must have launched a determined attack on one of the few vulnerable parts of Archibald's anatomy, for he suddenly nodded his head vigorously.

"Ah, you agree with me? I knew you would. We will now follow the trail to adventure—or a sheep herder's camp. Let's go!"

Percy, the second burro, was with difficulty herded into the narrow trail. Archibald followed him with great reluctance, but finally the man succeeded in driving his tiny pack train into concerted action, and they slowly trudged up the narrow defile.

Stanley Ross had been exiled to the desert country because certain eminent New York doctors had come to the conclusion that he had contracted a disease which yields itself to treatment most readily in the dry desert uplands.

Ross had not been breathing the dry air of the desert for a month before he was as healthy as a prize fighter. The fact was that Stanley Ross had overindulged in a certain pastime known as "reading the tape," and Nature had gone on a strike. The New York doctors had provided the first step toward recovery; the desert had done the rest.

But there had been another hurt that had not healed so readily—or at least Ross had so convinced himself. Stanley Ross fondly believed that he was heartbroken. The cause was a blonde bit of New York femininity who had fancied Ross for a while, but in the end had fancied the millions of an oil man more.

So he had stayed on in the West. A healthy restlessness had driven him out to explore the uncharted wastes of the vast Red Desert, and the ever changing wonders of rock, and sand, and sky, of sagebrush and cactus, of sparkling night-heavens had beckoned him on. For months now he had been wandering up and down this immeasurable wonderland, obeying every vagary of mind, exploring every nook and cranny that caught his itinerant fancy, his only companions the two burros which he had so whimsically named.

Mirages had beckoned. Colors so bizarre that no artist had dared to give them to canvas had soothed his soul. Grotesqueries of rock and sand and canon had intrigued him.

Ross still believed that the old hurt was still present in his bosom. Actually he had been having a capital time for months, and the girl no longer mattered. However, he had allowed himself gradually to fall into a state of whimsical melancholy. What he needed was adventure. He was bored, but had he known what lay at the end of the thin twisting trail before him his boredom might not have been so acute.

The rock defile, through which the trail led, was narrow, and the walls were nearly perpendicular. The passage was twisting, but a tiny trickle of water gave promise of a broader canon farther up. The trail, while very narrow, was well-defined and worn deep. It looked as though it had been in constant use for years.

Ross had progressed along this strange passage for about a quarter mile when his attention was suddenly arrested by something on the canon wall. Involuntarily, he stopped. Instantly the burros halted as though their motive power was automatically turned off whenever their master stopped walking.

"Great Horned Toads!" ejaculated Ross in a low voice. "Archibald, do you see what I see, or has the sun gone to my head? Has the world slipped back three centuries, or is it actually nineteen-twenty-three? 'Tain't possible, Archibald, but nevertheless I see what I see!"

There, not thirty feet distant, was a girl—a pretty girl—and she was shackled to four great iron rings, fastened in the canon wall, by means of handcuffs, ankle fetters, and four heavy chains!

CHAPTER TWO

BROKEN SHACKLES AND A MYSTERY

ROSS stood spellbound. He could not believe his own eyes.

That he should meet a human being in this vast waste of rock and sand and cactus was possible. That he should find a girl chained to a rock, like a felon of the black ages, was nothing short of incredible.

There was no denying the girl's existence, however. She was there, and she was in need of help.

His incredulity shattered, Ross was beside the girl in a bound. Even a cursory glance showed her to be undeniably pretty, and it also showed her to be quite as undeniably in a state of total exhaustion.

At Ross's approach, the girl raised her head with difficulty. Her eyes opened and she smiled slowly. Then her whole body suddenly fell forward against the chains that held her. She had fainted.

No stranger situation could be imagined than the finding of a beautiful girl chained to a rock in the midst of the great Red Desert. This, however, was a matter for future consideration. The girl needed immediate attention, and Ross's first thought was to release her.

When he examined her shackles Ross realized that release was not going to be easy. The four rings to which the chains were fastened were secured to the canon wall by means of heavy iron staples driven deep into fissures in the rock. A test of strength showed that nothing short of a charge of dynamite would ever loosen them.

The chains were comparatively heavy and well forged. A file was the only solution—and Ross did not possess a file.

Not till he examined the handcuffs did he see any hope of releasing the girl. These were not of the ordinary type. They were not the steel manacles of the sort used today, but were about two inches wide, heavy in construction and made of cast iron. The locking device was old-fashioned. They were a type of handcuff that had been obsolete for nearly three quarters of a century.

Having satisfied himself that they were really made of cast iron, Ross at once realized that it would be a comparatively easy task to free the girl. Securing a small rock for a hammer, he braced the girl back against the canon wall and held her wrist against the rock. A few well directed blows with the improvised hammer easily cracked the rusty cast iron and the handcuff fell away in two pieces.

The girl's wrist had been freed without more than slightly bruising the skin. The second handcuff was broken quite as easily. Ross gently lowered the girl to the ground.

Releasing her ankles was more difficult. The anklets were of heavier construction and harder to break without injuring the girl. However, by placing a rock under the anklet and being careful, Ross finally managed to shatter the cast iron without more than bruising the girl's slender ankles.

In an instant he had jerked the pack from one of the burros and spread his blanket roll out on the ground. Picking up the unconscious girl, he placed her on the blankets and improvised a pillow from his coat.

Almost opposite where the girl had been chained the tiny trickle of water had formed a miniature pool in the rocks. Seizing a tin cup from his camp outfit, Ross hurried to this pool, scooped up a cup of water, and in an instant was kneeling at the girl's side.

Dipping his fingers in the water, he flicked it across her face, then carefully bathed her forehead, and then set to chafing her wrists.

It was fully ten minutes before the girl showed any evidence of returning consciousness. Then her eyelids began to flutter. Finally she sighed deeply, and her eyes slowly opened.

Stanley Ross thought he had never seen such a look of abject terror as now appeared in the girl's eyes. It was as though she had just awakened from a terrible dream and was still laboring under its terrorizing influence. Such a look might have appeared in the eyes of a slave girl when Nero ruled in Rome.

For a moment, consciousness battled with that nightmare that had been seething through the girl's brain and finally won. Her eyes opened wide. A half smile slowly crossed her face. Whatever might have inspired her terror, the girl evidently recognized in Ross a friend.

Her lips, dry and parched, moved with difficulty, but Ross saw that they framed the word "Water!"

Lifting her head, he dampened the girl's lips from the cup and then allowed her to drink her fill. But weakness still held sway over her body, and she sank back on the blankets, exhausted. Her eyes closed again.

"Don't try to talk," advised Ross. "You just lie there and rest until I fix something for you. Then you can tell me about this thing."

For once in his life, Ross was glad that he had taken another man's advice. When he had started his desert pilgrimage an old prospector had advised him to include a few cans of soup in his outfit. Ross had demurred, seeing no use in packing superfluous weight, but the old desert rat had insisted.

Ross had included the soup. So far, he had had no use for it, but now it was to show its worth.

Collecting a few dry sticks from the stubby willows that grew around the pool, Ross soon had a tiny fire going. Opening a can of soup, he heated it over the fire and carried a cup of it to the girl.

"Oh, that's so good!" she murmured after she had drained the cup. "Thank you."

"Do you feel like talking?" asked Ross.

For a moment the girl regarded him with frank eyes. Then she shook her head wearily.

"Not—not just yet—please. I'm—so—tired." She sank back onto the blankets.

Realizing that, for the present, rest was the most important thing for her, Ross covered the girl with a blanket and set about his camp duties.

He finished unpacking his burros and turned them loose to pick at the scanty tufts of grass that grew along the seeping stream. This done, he set about preparing his own meal.

It was already dusk, and by the time he had cooked and eaten his supper darkness had settled down over the little canon. Washing his few dishes in the pool, Ross set them aside and turned his attention to finding enough firewood to keep the fire going.

In the darkness this was somewhat of a task, and Ross was absent from the camp for some little time. When he returned he saw that his strange guest had evidently fallen asleep.

Ross threw some wood on the fire and sat down with his back against a rock. Filling his pipe, he lighted it and leaned back to contemplate the events of the afternoon and evening.

His first mental reaction on finding the girl had been one of intense rage that any one, no matter what the cause or conditions, could be so utterly inhuman as to perpetrate such an act. He was still angry now, but he had cooled off to the extent that he could consider the affair calmly.

There seemed to be no off-hand explanation whatever. As far as Ross knew, there was no human habitation in all this desert waste, yet this trail up the little canon had been used frequently and recently, so somewhere up the winding trail must lie a solution to the mystery. But what it could be, or whether he could ever solve it, Ross could not imagine.

The whole affair was grotesque, bizarre. Why any one should chain a young girl to a rock wall in the midst of a heat-scorched desert was utterly incomprehensible. The girl was not gross or criminal-looking. On the contrary, she was pretty, delicate, and obviously refined. Her clothes bespoke a far different environment. How any one could be so inhuman as to subject her to such treatment was unfathomable.

Sitting there, smoking and watching the girl, mulling the strangeness of the affair over in his mind, Ross could offer himself no explanation. The only thing to do, apparently, was to wait for the girl to awaken and then wait for her to talk.

At any rate, the adventure which he had craved seemed to be at hand. Where it would lead him he had no idea.

The fire gradually burned low. The girl slept on. Ross removed the pipe from his mouth. His head nodded. In half an hour the campfire had wasted to an ember.

The man's head had sunk forward onto his breast; his body had relaxed comfortably against its support. He, too, was asleep.

Hours crept by. . . .

With a start, Ross awoke. The first faint glow of dawn was creeping down into the little canon. It was morning.

Sheepishly, Ross rubbed his eyes, aware that he had allowed the healthy fatigue of a day in the desert to conquer his senses and bring sleep when he had intended to watch throughout the night.

Gradually the events of the evening before came back to him, and he looked across to where he had wrapped the girl in his blankets. The bed was empty!

The girl was gone!

CHAPTER THREE

ADVENTURE WITH A VENGEANCE

IN AN INSTANT Ross was on his feet, the sleep fog automatically cleared from his brain.

One glance was enough. The dawn was far enough advanced so that he could see both up and down the canon. It was patent that the girl had vanished during the darkness.

The whole affair was so utterly impossible, so unreal, so like an Arabian Nights adventure, that Ross was almost prone to believe that it had been merely a dream, a desert hallucination. Not until his eyes again sought the canon wall did he convince himself that he had not been laboring under some mental aberration.

There could be no denying his eyes, though. There were the four heavy chains fastened to the canon wall, and there were the four broken shackles, mute evidence that he had stumbled onto a situation as exotic as one of the desert's own mirages.

No, there could be no question that the girl had actually existed. Nor could there be any question that she had disappeared. The only living thing in sight was Archibald, who stood with head bowed over the dead embers of last night's fire in his usual state of ignoble dejection.

At first thought it seemed impossible that the girl could have left camp, unaided, and it seemed quite as certain that no one could have taken her away by force, without rousing Ross.

As he considered it, however, Ross realized that exhaustion would come quickly to one chained to the rock and exposed to the sun without food or water. Recuperation would probably come quite as quickly. The girl had had both water and nourishment the evening before, and it would have been quite possible for her to have gained sufficient strength to leave, had she so chosen. There seemed to be no other explanation.

"Well, Archibald," said Ross, falling into his whimsical habit of addressing the burro, "when I started this trip I thought that you and Percy were the only asses in the party. Now I am convinced there are three of us. Here I have just been craving adventure for months. Yesterday I blundered right onto the craziest kind of a mystery, and then I go to sleep and let the whole thing get away from me! Fools can't think, but I suppose they've got to eat," he finished to himself.

He set about preparing his breakfast, meanwhile pondering the affair. The more he pondered the more mysterious it became.

Breakfast finished, he washed his dishes and then stepped over to gather up his bed-roll. Instantly he stopped short. There before him, scratched in the level sand of the canon floor, was a message:

"Please go away. There is only great danger if you investigate further."

There could be no denying the sincerity of that message. Coupled with the silent testimony of the inhuman shackles, it meant that the girl, whoever she might be, was in real peril.

Regaining her strength, she had quietly slipped away in the night, but before going she had left behind a warning to the man who had released her. It was evident that she did not wish to draw a stranger into a danger which she considered hers alone.

The warning, however, reacted on Ross like a red rag on a bull. It was a challenge to his manhood, to his thirst for adventure. Somewhere up that narrow canon was mystery; and somewhere, too, was a girl in unknown danger, a girl who patently enough needed assistance and a friend.

It took but a few minutes to round up the burros and rope on the packs.

"We will now proceed to rescue the fair maiden."

"Stick 'em up, an' do it quick!"

Ross whirled at the sound of the gruff voice—and found himself looking squarely into the muzzle of an ugly six-shooter. Behind it, was the most villainous-looking countenance Ross had ever seen.

"Come on! H'ist 'em up!" again jerked out the owner of the gun.

The situation was too unreal to be taken seriously.

"Ah, Archibald, the plot thickens! First we meet Beauty; now we meet the Beast. Point that gun the other way, my friend. It might go off and frighten my long-eared friend here. He's delicate, and I don't like to have his nerves shocked."

"H'ist them mits before I drill ya!"

Ross felt the muzzle of the gun jammed into his ribs, and a practised hand quickly searched his body. His automatic, carried for the sole purpose of exterminating rattlesnakes, was transferred to the other's pocket.

The vicious attitude of the gunman was far too real to be taken lightly. There was no doubt that he meant business.

"Ya can let 'em down now," said the gunman, stopping back.

Ross turned and surveyed his captor.

"If you don't mind telling me," he asked coldly, "to whom am I indebted for this early morning call?"

"Stow the flip gab. All I know is tha big boss said to bring ya in, an' I'm bringin' ya."

"Then I'm to understand that I'm a captive?"

"Understan' anythin' ya please. Now git travelin'."

Resistance was hopeless. His air of reckless bravado gone, boiling inwardly at the indignity forced upon him, Ross swung and trudged off up the canon trail.

For perhaps a quarter of a mile the narrow canon cleaved straight through the rock. Then it suddenly began a series of intricate turns, as though it had attempted a passage and had been baffled and forced to take a new direction about every fifty feet.

For a while, Ross stalked on without speaking. Suddenly he turned his head and spoke.

"Just where are you taking me, and who is the 'big boss'?"

"Never mind askin' dam' fool questions. Keep movin'!"

After another quarter mile of sharp turns, the canon suddenly broadened, and Ross found himself looking out into a basin bounded on all sides by high, perpendicular rock walls, smooth and straight.

The basin was oval in shape, and near the center was a group of 'dobe buildings, five in number. Toward these the captor directed their progress.

As he advanced, Ross looked keenly for signs of life, but though he sought every possible nook and cranny with his gaze, he could see neither man nor beast. The place seemed to be absolutely deserted.

At the first building, a small 'dobe structure that stood somewhat apart from the others, Ross was ordered to halt. Opening a heavy door, the man motioned with his gun for him to enter. Ross stepped over the threshold, and instantly the door clanged shut behind him.

He heard the heavy bolt drop into place. Then he heard his captor walking away.

Then, for the first time, it dawned on Ross that he was actually a prisoner, and that he had been captured with some definite object in view.

The room in which he found himself was about twelve feet square. The walls were of 'dobe; the floor was of the same material, hard packed and smooth. There were two small windows, but both were heavily protected with thick iron bars, set deep in the hard-packed 'dobe. The furniture consisted of a crude table and chair.

A single test of strength showed Ross that he could never hope to open the door. A crowbar or an axe would be necessary for that, and there was no implement of any kind in the room. The walls were fully eighteen inches thick. Under the fierce heat of the desert the 'dobe had grown as hard as cement. Unless he received help from outside, there seemed to be no possibility of escape.

Time passed. Finally he ceased his idle wandering about the room and sank into the chair.

His pipe and tobacco still remained in his pocket. He took out his pipe, lighted it, and fell to considering his strange predicament.

It seemed that ages had passed before he detected approaching footsteps. The bolt was raised. The heavy door swung on its hinges. His captor stood outside, gun in hand. Behind him was a Chinaman, carrying a tray on which was food.

The Chinese entered the room, placed the tray on the table and arranged the food. As he was performing this service, he said in a low whisper, so low that his companion could not hear, "Missee say Wong flix good dlinner."

"Come on, Chink, make it snappy!" snapped the man with the gun.

The door slammed. The bolt fell into place. Ross was alone again.

Dubiously, he surveyed the food. The words of the Chinese came back to him, "Missee say Wong fix good dlinner."

So the girl knew that he was a captive. Well, all he could do was wait. But who was she? And what did his imprisonment mean?

In the meantime there was no reason for wasting a good dinner. Ross was hungry, and in twenty minutes the last scrap of food had disappeared.

Settling back in his chair, he again filled his pipe and prepared to await developments with as good grace as possible.

It was hours later that he heard footsteps nearing his prison.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROSS IS INVITED TO DINE

ROSS heard a key in the lock, and a moment later the heavy door swung open. It was the gunman again. He was evidently not mindful to take any chances with his prisoner, for he again was holding his revolver ready.

"Come on out!" he barked, motioning with the gun for Ross to step out of the room. "The big boss wants ya."

"Oh, he does?" returned Ross. "Maybe I'll find out now what all this is about."

"You'll find out all right. Mebbe find out more'n ya want."

"You know, I don't think I'm going to like you at all. I shouldn't be surprised if I had serious trouble with you yet. But lead on!"

Ross's persiflage was far from pleasing to the gunman. He glared malevolently at Ross for a moment, as if half minded to inflict physical punishment, finally thought better of it, and then jerked out, "I ain't leadin'; I'm followin'. Git movin'!"

Ross was conducted to the largest of the group of 'dobe buildings, evidently used as a dwelling, and was ushered directly into a bedroom.

He had expected anything except what he now saw. The room was such as might have been found in a brown-stone mansion on Fifth Avenue. The floor was covered with a deep soft rug. There was a mahogany bed, with a spotless white spread, and a dressing-table of the same wood. To one side of the latter stood a full-length plate mirror.

"The big boss said ya was to shave, an' then ya was ta dress fer dinner. Yo'll find all tha togs there on that bed." The gunman directed Ross's attention to the bed with a flourish of his gun.

Ross looked. The garments on the bed comprised a complete evening outfit, from studded shirt to patent-leather pumps.

He was surprised to find that the clothes fit him well. The pumps were a trifle tight and the suit was a bit snug, but a half hour later, when he surveyed himself in the long pier glass, he was well satisfied.

"All right, keeper, let's be on our way. I'm curious," he said.

His captor conducted him down the long veranda, and a moment later he was ushered into a large room where a table was laid for dinner.

CHAPTER FIVE

A STRANGE DINNER

BY THIS TIME Ross was prepared for almost anything, yet the room that he now stepped into was even more astounding than the bedroom.

In the center stood a table arranged for four. It fairly sparkled with glassware, silver and spotless linen. At one side of the room stood a huge buffet. Its top was well covered with glasses, liquor shakers and and sundry bottles, the contents of which were obvious.

The occupants of the room chiefly held his attention, though. They were three, two men and a woman. Here, at last, he was to know the meaning of the strange events of the preceding twenty-four hours.

The two men were standing close together and had evidently been conversing. Both were in faultless evening dress. The girl stood apart; aloof, so it seemed. Despite her evening dress, Ross instantly recognized her as the girl he had found in the canon.

One of the men was young and exceedingly well built. His wide, heavily muscled shoulders suggested out-of-the-ordinary strength. His hair was wiry and red; its color was amply reflected in his ruddy complexion. The face was strong and would have been attractive but for one feature—the eyes. The eyes were small, deep-set, and far too close together. They might have been said to be piggish. The dull glint in them was not reassuring. Ross knew at once that he did not like this man.

It was the second of the two men, however, who was really striking. He was, in fact, an amazing figure. His stature was above the average height, over six feet, and he was thin to emaciation. Ross thought he had never seen so tall and yet so slender a man. He was so thin as to be ludicrous, yet there seemed to be a remarkable whipcord strength about him.

His face was narrow and as lean as his body. A thin, high nose divided a pair of piercing black eyes. It was the eyes that struck instant attention. Their everchanging lights fairly gleamed. They seemed to be alive with a thousand fires.

The impression was instantly registered with Ross that here was a man who was possessed of unusual personal power, or who was stark mad. Those eyes could allow of no other conclusion.

As Ross was ushered into the room it was this strange individual who instantly stepped forward.

"Ah, our guest has arrived," he said. His voice was soft as velvet, yet it carried an irritating quality that was thin-edged and biting, and scarcely concealed. "Step right up, Mr. Waring; dinner will be served at once. Wong, the wine."

From somewhere the Chinese, Wong, had glided forth and, drawing out a chair, indicated Ross's place at the table. Immediately he had filled the glasses with a sparkling liquid. Ross recognized it as champagne.

There was no chance to reply. In fact, Ross was too bewildered to think of anything adequate to say. In a moment he would be himself again, but just now his wits were all at cross purposes.

As the elderly man greeted Ross, the girl and younger man took their places at the table as if they had only been waiting his arrival to proceed with the meal. As Ross stepped forward, at the servant's indication, his host reached out and lifted the wine glass at his plate.

"We will drink to the health of our guest," he said evenly.

Automatically, Ross lifted his glass. The others did likewise. For an instant the four glasses were held aloft, the lights playing on their sparkling depths. Then the elderly man turned to Ross with a rather elaborate low bow and said in a voice that was like gray steel:

"Mr. Waring, allow us to drink to your most excellent good health——:—— *for tomorrow you hang!*"

The words were like an icy blast. Up to that moment the whole affair had been rather ludicrous to Ross. He had realized that he was in danger at times, but that this danger would involve the loss of his life he had not for a moment imagined.

Now he realized that his very life was at stake; more than that, unless he could find some way to extract himself from his predicament, that he was sure to forfeit it. There could be no denying the import of the toast. Ross did not know why, but he did know that this tall, lean stranger with the mad eyes meant to kill him as sure as he stood there.

For a moment, the young New Yorker lost his complacency. He stood with the glass poised in his hand, his brain whirl-

ing. But this was only for a moment. In a second he had regained his poise. Raising the glass to his lips, he drained it to the bottom and turned to his host.

"Thank you, sir," he said carelessly, "for your kind wishes for my good health. I hate to dispute you, but I *don't* believe you will hang me in the morning. And my name is not Waring, either. It happens to be Ross."

"As you will, Mr. Waring, as you will. Any name would do as well. And I assure you I shall have the pleasure of hanging you in the morning. Let me warn you, too, Mr. Waring, not to attempt anything. I want this dinner peaceful. It is an engagement dinner," turning with an exaggerated bow to the girl, "the occasion of the betrothal of my dear niece to Mr. Beebe here. I *know* you will be interested in that, Mr. Waring. But just to forestall any idea you might have of providing any unnecessary entertainment I have stationed my friends, Mr. Garfin and Mr. Poole, at the door with instructions to shoot if you get unruly. Now, let us eat."

Ross glanced over his shoulder to find Garfin lounging in the door by which he had entered, a malignant smile wrinkling his face. In an opposite doorway lounged another individual fully as ugly looking as Garfin. This was evidently Poole. Both had guns. It was obvious that for the present no break for liberty was possible.

For the most part, that dinner was a nightmare to Ross. Afterward he wondered how he had managed to get through it.

After the first effusion, the elderly man made no effort to include Ross in the conversation. Glad of this respite, Ross attempted to collect his wits and to form some estimate of his predicament and of the people with whom he had to deal.

The elderly man carried on a continuous animated conversation, mostly with the man whom he had designated as Beebe. Several times he addressed himself to Ross, but always in such a manner that it was obvious no answer was expected. A number of times he included the girl in his conversation, but the only time she made reply was to answer a question, and then it was merely to say, "No, Uncle Arthur."

Once or twice Beebe addressed the elderly man as "Mr. Ward," so Ross concluded that his name was Arthur Ward. The girl's identity he was not able to learn, except that her first name was Virginia.

Beebe ignored Ross and by his attitude seemed to be currying favor with Ward. As for the girl, she remained silent, her eyes downcast, palpably holding herself aloof. Once or twice Ross caught a fleeting message from her eyes. It seemed to him that she was in utter terror, yet in perfect control of her nerves.

In those flashing telegrams from her eyes Ross was sure he caught a mute appeal for help. If this was a betrothal dinner Ross felt sure that the betrothal was without the consent of one of the parties concerned, and he was determined then and there not only to effect his own escape but to aid the girl as well.

The food was excellent and perfectly served by the Chinese, yet Ross could not have told a single item, and he thought the dinner never would end. The presence of Garfin and Poole was mute evidence that for the present he could do nothing. When the meal finally came to an end and Ward pushed back his chair, it brought a feeling of distinct relief to the young man. Now at least was the beginning of the end.

"Now, Mr. Waring," said Ward suavely, "we will repair to my study, where I have a few things to say to you before we break up this very pleasant little party. I hardly think my niece will care to accompany us."

They rose from the table, and Ross was ushered into an adjoining room which was even more striking in its way than either of the others he had been in that evening.

A brisk fire burned on a wide hearth from above which looked down a magnificent ram's head. Other trophies of a similar nature adorned the other walls. Interspersed with these were guns, Indian weapons, horsehair lariats—in fact, every accoutrement and trophy of the old-time West. It was a rather remarkable collection, one which under different circumstances would have deeply interested Stanley Ross.

Instantly he knew where those curious antiquated shackles, which had bound the girl, had come from. Here were several similar pairs.

Ross was directed to a chair in front of the fire. Ward took another, facing him, while Beebe sat down on a wide bench on the far side of the fire. Ross waited expectantly.

Ward offered his guest a cigar. Selecting one for himself, he clipped its end very deliberately and lit it with aggravating leisure. Finally he leaned back in his chair and gazed steadily at Ross with his mad eyes. A tiny smile, cynical and cruel, crooked around his thin-lipped mouth.

"I could have had you killed at once, Mr. Waring," he said deliberately, his voice soft and well-modulated, yet biting, burning, "but I did not choose to do that. Instead, I wanted to bring you here this evening so that you could fully realize just what a serious thing it is, and how useless it is to buck Arthur Ward. And then, too, I wanted my niece to know that I am to be obeyed absolutely."

"I suppose, Mr. Ward," asked Ross, "that it would be quite useless to tell you that my name is not Waring at all; that I do not even know any one of that name, or that I have never seen your niece, until last evening?"

"Quite useless, I can assure you, Mr. Waring. I am absolutely certain of your identity. I do not make mistakes.

"Mr. Waring, I never forget an injury. I remember forever, and my one bad trait is the fact that I always have revenge. I would have got you in the end, Waring, anyway, but your fool stunt of following my niece here saved me a lot of trouble. Waring, you should have known that of all people on earth you would have the least chance of marrying my niece.

"Tonight you can have the extreme pleasure of reflecting that you will hardly be dead before Virginia will be the wife of Beebe."

"And suppose she refuses?" asked Ross.

"We are a hundred miles from anywhere, Waring. Things could happen that would make Virginia glad to marry Beebe—or any one.

"One more thing, Waring, and then we will terminate this interview," Ward went on dispassionately. "I want you to know that this is only the beginning. I shall not be satisfied until I have exterminated your entire family. It may take me years, but I shall certainly have the pleasure of killing your brother and your father. It does not pay to do injury to Arthur Ward.

"You will have tonight to reflect on what might have been. In the morning I shall hang you.

"That is all I have to say, and since it will be quite useless for you to say anything you may as well return to your room. Mr. Garfin and Mr. Poole will see that you have safe conduct."

Ross knew that for the present he would have to submit. Resistance would be useless just now. He was one against four. The odds were too great. He could only wait, hoping that the night would bring opportunity.

However, before he went he could not resist a last display of bravado—bravado which he did not by any means feel.

Rising from his seat, Ross bowed low to Ward.

"Good-night, Mr. Ward. Thank you for a most excellent dinner and a most entertaining evening. And let me assure you that you will *not* hang me in the morning."

Turning on his heel, Ross passed out of the room.

CHAPTER SIX

A FORLORN HOPE

WHEN ROSS stepped out into the darkness his first thought was that he would make a dash for liberty. This hope died almost before it was born, though, for he felt the muzzle of a revolver pressed close to his ribs and Garfin's rasping voice growled into his ear:

"Make just one move fer a break an' I'll plug ya. The boss says he's goin' to hang ya in the morning, but I'd like to save him tha trouble."

Ross knew that Garfin was not indulging in idle words. The gunman would gladly kill him. Then, too, out in the shadows another form kept them close company. He knew this was Poole and that should he succeed in worsting Garfin his chance of escaping the second gunman's bullets was very remote. No, the time was not yet.

The three trudged back to Ross's one-room prison, and it was only a minute or two until the door had slammed on him, the bolt had fallen into place and the lock snapped its vicious message.

He was once more a prisoner.

Ross sought in the darkness for the crude chair and threw himself down into it. He knew that for the time being there was no chance of escape, so he gave himself up momentarily to a contemplation of his plight.

Who was this strange girl whom he had rescued, only to have her vanish into the night? Why had she not spoken tonight? Why had she given him no hint of action? Who was Beebe, that he would accept a betrothal which was obviously odious to the girl? And, lastly, who was Ward with his mad eyes?

Who was Waring, and what had he done to merit such malicious vengeance on the part of Ward?

These and many other questions Ross asked himself, but he had no satisfactory answer to any one of them. Only a jumble of baffling mystery presented itself. His brain seethed with impossible solutions, but he had to admit that actually he was completely at sea.

Only a few facts stood out which could be accepted as a basis on which to work.

He, Ross, had been taken for another man, Waring by name. Ward evidently hated Waring intensely and was determined to put him to death for a wrong, either fancied or real. There could be no doubt, too, that Ward was, in a degree, insane.

What part Beebe was playing Ross could not determine, beyond the facts that he was in favor with Ward and that he wanted the girl and would take her on whatever terms he could get her.

The girl was obviously in great peril. It could be seen that she hated Beebe, but at the same time was powerless to resist any order of her uncle. Ross could readily see that she was in a position where death might well be preferable to what she was facing.

And, undeniably, there was the fact that he, Ross, was sure to meet death in the morning unless he could devise some way out of his dilemma.

The night was far gone when he had finished considering these things. It was then that a plan of action first suggested itself to him. As it matured in his mind he realized that it was a forlorn hope; but his circumstances were so utterly desperate that there seemed nothing to do but give it a trial. He knew that its success would depend entirely on the element of surprise.

Having once settled in his mind what he should do, Ross threw himself down on the crude table and was soon sound asleep.

It was hardly daylight when he awoke, but he did not allow himself to drop back to sleep again. He was going to be ready.

It was fully three hours later that he heard approaching footsteps. Slipping quietly across the room, Ross flattened himself against the wall beside the door and waited.

The footsteps drew nearer and nearer. A key grated in the lock. It clicked. The bolt was raised. Slowly the door swung on its hinges.

Like a flash, Ross slipped from his hiding-place and darted through the doorway. The only human within sight was Garfin. Like a mad thunderbolt Ross bore down upon him.

Taken by surprise, Garfin barely had time to fire before Ross was upon him. Too startled to take definite aim, his bullet went wild. With a force that was terrific Ross struck him with the full impact of his body. The two went down in a tangled heap. Garfin's gun was knocked from his grasp and went spinning a dozen feet away.

Garfin was not without courage of a kind, but all his life he had depended on a gun to enforce his arguments. Physical combat had not been one of his long suits, and now he found himself no match for his younger antagonist.

Stan Ross was far from a weakling physically. Long months afoot in the desert had made him as hard as nails. Not so long ago he had been known as a football player of some note. Now he used that knowledge of rough-and-tumble combat to the fullest extent.

Taking Garfin by surprise, Ross had the initial advantage, and when the two went down he was on top. Striking, kicking, using the crushing force of his body, he went at the gunman in a demoniacal storm. For an instant it looked as though he would beat his enemy into insensibility before he could offer any material resistance.

But Garfin was fighting for his life and he knew it. He was not to be vanquished so easily. In a moment the two men were threshing and rolling on the ground in a fierce struggle.

Youth, however, was not to be denied. Those sledge-hammer blows were having a telling effect. Garfin was weakening. Gradually Ross was wearing him down.

Ross sought the throat of his enemy. Garfin's breath came in gasps. His eyes were bulging. Gradually Ross brought his knee up until it pressed into Garfin's stomach. A final effort would end the struggle. Slowly Garfin's head bent backward. Then—

A crashing, blinding blow caught Ross on his head. For a brief instant a million fires flamed before his eyes. Then utter blackness.

He slumped forward across the body of his antagonist.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WONG INTERVENES

WHEN ROSS returned to consciousness it was with a sense of bewilderment. His head seemed alive with shooting pains: his eyes burned intensely; his body was sore and stiff.

Gradually he fought the fog from his brain and opened his eyes. He was dimly aware that he was back in his prison room, stretched out on the table. Painfully he sat up.

And then he saw that he was not alone. There was another person in the room. As his eyes pierced the semi-gloom he was aware that the man before him was Arthur Ward.

Instantly his brain cleared, and he swung himself around to face his jailor.

Ward was standing in the center of the room, his feet wide apart, his hands behind his back. A sardonic smile disfigured his face.

"Well," he inquired, "so you decided not to die?"

"Yes, I decided not to die," said Ross. "I might remind you, too, that it is no

longer morning and I have not been hung."

"No, and you're not going to be, either. I have prepared a much more pleasant death for you."

"Thanks!"

"Don't waste your thanks," replied Ward. "Before you're through you'll be far from thanking me. You see, Waring, your little outbreak this morning set me to thinking. If you had taken things quietly I would have hung you, and it would all be over now. But you had to try to escape and that set me to thinking that hanging was too pleasant for you. It would be over too quickly. There would be no time for reflection. So I devised something really fitting for your case."

While Ward was speaking the man Poole had entered, carrying a wooden box which he deposited gingerly in one corner and then quickly withdrew. He seemed afraid.

"Yes, Waring," Ward went on, "I've planned a death for you that I like much better than hanging. And, damn your rotten soul to eternity," he snarled, "you'll know what real torture is before you go out!"

With a sudden movement, he whirled, kicked the lid from the box, darted through the doorway, and had crashed the door shut before Ross fairly realized what he was doing.

Half bewildered, it was a moment before he could attach any meaning to Ward's action. Then it dawned on him that there was a deep significance to the box which Poole had brought in. Some sinister portent lay in that box of wood.

Fascinated, Ross sat watching the box, realizing that it held his fate, scarce knowing what to expect, and certainly not expecting what developed.

For a long minute nothing happened. Ross grew nervous with the strain. Then a faint buzzing came from the box. Silence. Again came that strange sound. And again. A slithering rustle as of stiff silk rubbed together.

And then Ross's scalp prickled with horror and his blood fairly froze in his veins, for over the edge of the box appeared a hideous, swaying head! There came a second! A third! And then a fourth!

They were huge diamond-back rattlesnakes!

As Ross recognized the big diamond-backs he knew instantly that he was trapped. To step down onto the floor meant death, a horrible, grewsome death. To remain on the table—

Instinctively, he drew his feet up onto the table as the big reptiles left the box, one by one. He counted eight in all.

Ross gave himself up to black despair. Down there on the floor awaited a fate too hideous for words. . . .

IT MUST have been fully two hours later, and dusk was already settling down and darkening the room, when Ross heard footsteps.

They approached his prison. For a moment his heart leaped within him at the possibility of rescue. But the door did not open. Instead, he heard the taunting voice of Ward from outside:

"Oh, you're safe enough so far, Waring. They can't get you as long as you stay on that table. I planned that. Wasn't it kind of me to be so thoughtful? But there won't be any food and there won't be any water, and all the time you'll be going through hell. I planned that, too. And then there'll come a time when you can't stand it any longer. You'll either fall from the table from weakness, or you'll go mad and step down onto the floor. They'll always be waiting, Waring. And then they'll get you, damn you!" The voice, rising to a shrill crescendo of passion, ended in a burst of wild maniacal laughter.

Receding footsteps told him that Ward had gone away.

As the gloom deepened into utter darkness it seemed to Ross that he would go mad. His brain seethed with wild impulses. A hundred times he pictured himself lying there on the floor, a bloated, blackened thing. A hundred times he went through death. Only that hope which "springs eternal" kept him from stepping down onto the floor and making an end of it.

Gradually Ross quieted. He finally settled back against the wall in a state of apathy, little knowing or little caring when the end would come.

An hour passed.

Suddenly Ross became aware of an unusual sound. From somewhere in back of him came a low *"Hist!"* so low as hardly to be heard. Stealthily, he raised himself to the height of the barred window and peered into the darkness.

Dimly he could make out a head outlined against the sky. A low, whispered voice spoke:

"You take!"

Unmistakably it was the voice of Wong. There was a grating sound as of something being passed between the bars.

Ross reached out his hand and it closed over cold steel.

An automatic!

"You take!" again came the whispered voice.

This time Ross found his hand closing over a cartridge belt.

"Me bring Ga'fin. *You shoot!"*

Like a ghost, the form at the window was gone without a sound.

With the feel of that cold steel in his hand Ross's spirits rose like a tide. All his waning confidence returned. He was instantly his own man again, confident, cool, without fear.

Quickly he buckled the belt around his waist. With sure fingers, he made certain that the gun was loaded. Slipping off the safety, he knelt on the table, facing the door, and waited.

Ross did not know whether he would ever leave that room alive, but he did know that the first men to open the door would die.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"YOU'LL SETTLE WITH ME"

ARTHUR WARD stood with his back to the big living-room fire, his feet wide apart, hands crossed behind his back, head lowered, eyes peering from beneath shaggy brows. It was a characteristic attitude and one which peculiarly expressed the man's calculated cruelty.

Beebe was seated on the wide fireplace bench, his feet stretched far in front of him. He was slowly smoking, his whole sprawling attitude one of indolent approval. Things were shaping themselves quite to the liking of Larson Beebe.

The girl, Virginia, was seated in a chair somewhat in front of her uncle. The wild look of her eyes and her agitated face told that she was going through an ordeal that was breaking her bit by bit.

"But, Uncle Arthur," she burst out, "surely you can't mean to do this terrible thing. Why, I don't love Mr. Beebe at all. I scarcely know him, and I don't want to marry anyone."

"My dear niece," replied Ward evenly, "love has no part in my scheme of things. Hate rules the world, and hate is my creed. Love makes people soft and indolent. Hate is the great inspirator. Hate makes the world go 'round.

"Sentiment has no place whatever in this marriage. It is entirely a marriage of convenience. Your personal inclinations have no weight whatever. I wish you to marry Beebe; therefore you will do it."

The girl's color had heightened as she listened to her uncle's ultimatum. As he finished, a grim expression of defiance settled on his face.

"Well, I won't!" she answered crisply.

"As you will, Virginia, but if you do not consent to marry Beebe within twenty-four hours I shall leave you here alone with him. I imagine after a couple

of weeks of that you'll be quite willing to marry him."

"Oh, you beast!" For an instant, as Ward's full meaning became clear to her, it looked as though the girl would faint.

Then, like a wild beast at bay, she turned on Beebe in a burst of blazing furry.

"And you, Larson Beebe, what have you to say? Are you going to be a party to this? Are you as much a beast as my uncle?"

Beebe regarded her tolerantly for a moment out of his piggish eyes before he spoke. A catlike smile of satisfaction curved his lips. He answered slowly, indolently:

"Virginia, I am wild about you. I want you, and I am going to have you. As long as you refuse to love me I'm not at all particular how I get you. One way suits me as well as another."

The girl turned back to her uncle. Her hands went out in an imploring gesture. For an instant she seemed about to plead. Then she evidently thought better of it.

"I suppose you understand, Uncle Arthur," she asked in a low cold voice, "that I will kill myself before I will let this happen?"

"My dear Virginia, you do not seem to understand the situation at all. You are absolutely in my power. You cannot kill yourself because I will not permit it. I will not give you the chance. You will do exactly as I say."

"Not yet, Ward! First, you'll settle with me!"

Stanley Ross stood in the doorway. But it was not the Stanley Ross, urbane, bored, carefree, who, a few days before, had whimsically sought adventure up an unknown canon trail. He had found adventure now, and it had used him roughly. His face and hands were grimy. His clothes were dirty and torn. One sleeve had been almost rent from his shoulder. His hair was riotously disheveled and clotted with blood. Down one side of his face extended a great splash of dirty dried blood.

In his right hand was an ugly-looking automatic, and in his face and eyes was a look of savage fury.

At the sound of Ross's voice, Ward whirled and whipped out a gun. But he was too late, for Ross, with a steadiness and coldness belied by the savagery of his face and figure, had fired. A look of unutterable amazement overspread the face of Arthur Ward. He wavered on his feet for a moment, and then, when a spot of red began to widen on his shirt front, he toppled backward, lifeless.

Almost at the same instant a hatchet hurtled through the room and buried its blade deep in the wall beside Larson Beebe, missing his head by the merest fraction of an inch. Wong was going into action. Beebe slid forward from his seat and ducked to temporary safety behind the table.

Ward had not had time to aim, but he had instinctively pulled the trigger. The bullet caught Ross on the head and cut a long shallow furrow just above his left temple. The wound itself was not serious, but for a moment it blinded Ross. That moment was fatal, for as he roused himself from the shock he knew that he had forgotten Poole.

Instantly Ross whirled to face the other doorway, but was too late. The heavy bullet spun him half around. For an instant he fought to retain his balance. Then he pitched forward onto the floor.

Painfully, with almost a superhuman effort, Ross raised himself with one hand and deliberately shot Poole through the chest.

Then, mercifully, consciousness was blotted out.

CHAPTER NINE

VIRGINIA EXPLAINS

WHEN ROSS returned to consciousness it was to a blurred, feverish, pain-wracked world.

He did not know where he was or what had happened. He only knew that his head was bandaged and splitting with pain; that his shoulder was stiff and sore, incapable of being moved even the fraction of an inch, and that it pained with a dull, throbbing hurt; that his eyes burned and blurred; and that his entire body burned with ten thousand fires.

Of one thing more was Ross conscious. That was the girl. When she saw that Ross had temporarily come out of the fog she hurried to his side and answered the unasked question on his lips by holding a cup of cold water to them. She seemed to have been waiting for ages to do just that.

Ross drank gratefully, but when he would have questioned her she laid her finger across his lips and said;

"Sh-h-h-ush! Not now. We'll talk when you feel better. Just now you need sleep more than anything else."

And Stanley Ross obeyed. In an instant he was asleep, a wild, feverish sleep that brought no rest.

There followed days of half consciousness, half nightmare; days when Ross neither knew nor cared what happened, when wild delirium alternated with painful reality.

He was far too ill to make any inquiries about anything that had happened. In fact, he was only conscious of the fact that whenever the fog lifted the girl always seemed to be present—a ministering angel who brought cooling draughts, and soothing applications for his head and shoulders.

Finally there came a day when Ross awoke to a sane world. The fever fog had departed from his brain. His head no longer throbbed and beat like a thousand devils. His shoulder was sore and stiff, but it no longer was filled with maddening pain. He was weak, very weak, but the world was once more interesting and he was acutely aware of a most prodigious appetite.

Ross was aware that he was in the room to which he had been conducted by Garfin on the night of the strange dinner. Beyond that, he was not interested. He was aware that the girl was still acting as his nurse.

At meal time the Chinese, Wong, came in with a tray. He was still too weak to care as to the whereabouts of the others, or what had happened on the night of the fight.

He did learn that the girl's name was Virginia Carver, but that was all.

In less than a week he was sitting out on the long veranda every afternoon. With returning strength came returning curiosity. He wanted to know the story of this strange habitation in the desert and to learn just what had happened on the night Wong had aided him to escape.

Several times he broached the subject to the girl, but each time she put him off with the statement that he was not yet strong enough to talk. The excuse was obviously becoming threadbare, however, as his health improved.

One afternoon, while Ross was sitting on the veranda, the girl came out and took a seat opposite him. It was patent that the time for explanations had come.

"I suppose, Mr. Ross," began Virginia Carver, "that you have been wondering just what this whole thing is about, and you certainly are entitled to an explanation. I don't know how I am ever going to thank you for what you have done for me. You were very brave."

"Well, suppose you forget about the thanks, Miss Carver," said Ross, visibly embarrassed. "I *would* like to know all about this queer affair, though. I thought Arabian Nights were ancient history, but I'm about ready to believe anything."

"In order for you to understand I'll have to take you back about seven years," explained the girl. "At that

time my uncle, Arthur Wand, was one of the biggest operators in Wall Street. All his life he has been a very peculiar man; eccentric; always doing queer things for which there seemed no explanation, and never taking any one into his confidence.

"In the Street he was known as a plunger. He made a great deal of money. Just how much I have no idea beyond the fact that he was always very generous with my mother, his sister. But at one time he must have been very wealthy indeed.

"Seven years ago it seems that he plunged too heavily and got caught. His fortune was practically wiped out. When everything was settled up he was still a wealthy man—that is, he was probably worth a half million dollars—but the great bulk of his fortune was gone.

"He fought fiercely to keep from going under. There were days and nights at a time when I don't think he slept at all. He was like a wild man, but the combination against him was too great and he went under.

"At first we though he was going to lose his mind. For weeks he acted very queer. Finally he seemed to get a hold on himself and he appeared rational.

"He settled up his business, and then suddenly disappeared. He left no word where he was going—just dropped out of sight. That was seven years ago, and for two years we heard nothing from him. Five years ago I got a letter from him asking me to visit him here. I came and found things just about as you see them now.

"He seemed perfectly rational and contented. Of course, he was queer and erratic, but he had always been that. He seemed to have forgotten Wall Street entirely and spent most of his time making a collection of the accoutrements of horse and man of the old-time West. I doubt if there is a finer collection in existence.

"He did a lot of entertaining, too, for his old friends, inviting them out for long visits. Here his eccentricity cropped out, for he insisted on going to great lengths to have everything just as it would be in New York. There must be fifteen dress suits in the house, and he always asked every one to dress for dinner. He imported wines and foods. Wong has been with him ever since he has been here and he is an excellent cook.

"I came out every year. He was always very kind to me and has made every effort to entertain me. I thought he acted a little more queer each year, and I often wondered if he was not a little unbalanced mentally.

"When I came out this year there was a great change. I saw at once that he was quite mad. He imagined that he was being persecuted by the Warings, and kept Poolé and Garfin, New York gunmen, to protect him. The Warings were the people who engineered his defeat in Wall Street, and Uncle Arthur hated them intensely. He not only imagined they were persecuting him, but he also imagined that the younger Waring, whom I have never seen, was trying to marry me. This seemed to be an obsession with him.

"When I got here I found that Larson Beebe was Uncle Arthur's guest. I had met Mr. Beebe in New York several times, and I detested him. I had good reason to. He—well, I have always despised him.

"Just what his hold or influence on Uncle Arthur was I haven't the slightest idea, but I had hardly arrived before Uncle Arthur began to insist that I marry him.

"Of course, I refused, and it was then that Uncle Arthur's insanity came to the surface. He had always been kindness itself, but now he suddenly became the very incarnation of cruelty. While there was no question but that he was entirely mad, yet in his madness his brain was as shrewd and cunning as ever.

"When I refused to marry Beebe he began to practice his cruelties on me in an effort to break my will. I was utterly at his mercy, for there was no way that I could escape. All I could do was submit.

"The culmination of his indignities was to chain me to the rocks where you found me. Whether he would have left me there till I was dead I hardly know, but I think not. His brain was so unbalanced that it would be hard to tell.

"I ran away that night because I knew he would kill you if he found you with me. Evidently he had Garfin watching me, or he would not have learned that you had released me. He was obsessed with the idea that you were the younger Waring.

"The rest of the story you know. I dare not think of what would have happened to me if you had not come to my rescue, Mr. Ross."

"But what really happened the night I escaped?" asked Ross.

"Well—you shot both Uncle Arthur and Poole," she replied hesitatingly.

"Did I—did I—" he floundered helplessly.

"Yes," she replied evenly. "Providence helped your aim that night. Wong buried them both. No, Mr. Ross," she finished, as she noted the look on his face, "don't feel that way about it. If you hadn't killed them they would have killed you, and I would have suffered a fate worse than death. Under the circumstances I cannot feel sorry."

"What happened to Beebe?" asked Ross, curious as to the fate of that dubious individual.

"That's a mystery. He simply disappeared that night and we have not seen him since. Wong just barely missed him that night with a hatchet. I think he is deathly afraid of Wong. At any rate, he is gone. And now, Mr. Ross, I want to ask you a question: How did you manage to escape from your prison that night? Wong won't tell me a thing. He just grins when I ask him, and I suspect I owe a great deal to Wong."

"You surely do, Miss Carver," answered Ross fervently. "That Chinaman is a wonder. In some way he got hold of my automatic and cartridge belt. He passed them to me through the window, and then, under some pretense, got Garfin to come and open the door. Then—well, Garfin won't ever bother us again."

CHAPTER TEN

A NEW DANGER

WITH the passing days, Ross found new strength and new interest. His head was already healed and his shoulder, beyond being stiff, no longer bothered him. While still somewhat weak, he was able to walk about as he pleased.

He found it very pleasant to pass the afternoons away on the long veranda. Here he was often joined by Virginia Carver, and the two spent hours together that were very pleasant. In fact, Ross suddenly became acutely aware that he was taking more than a passing interest in this girl.

Virginia Carver was exceedingly lovely. Moreover, she was of a type and personality that particularly appealed to Stanley Ross. While she was nursing him through his illness he had found her presence very pleasing. Now that he was nearly well, her companionship was becoming even more delightful, and he realized that, as far as he was concerned, friendship was ripening into something more definite. As he continued to improve he knew that the time was fast approaching when they would have to leave this desert oasis.

He found his mind continually recurring to Larson Beebe. How had he managed to disappear so completely that night? Where had he gone? What was he doing now? Ross could not dismiss the idea that they would hear from Beebe again, and that when they did it would mean trouble.

This conviction was the more firmly fixed in his mind by the actions of Virginia Carver. Ross felt sure that the girl was deeply worried over something; she seemed anxious and nervous; she appeared to be continually watching and listening for something. Intuition told Ross that the cause of her perturbation was Beebe.

Intuition again told him that perhaps Wong could throw some light on the situation. The next time that the Chinese appeared on the veranda Ross stopped him.

"Wong," he said, "Miss Carver seems to be worried about something. Do you know what it is? Is it about Beebe? Do you know where he is?"

Wong's face betrayed not a single glimmer of comprehension.

"No savvy," he said.

"Yes, you do savvy, too. What's wrong here? Where's Beebe?"

Wong glanced hurriedly up and down the veranda as though he feared some one would overhear him. Then he jerked a meaning finger toward the mouth of the little canon.

"Him there," he said in a low voice.

"What do you mean?"

"Him hide in canon. Kill all we go out."

"We don't have to go out that way."

"No other way can go," explained Wong.

"What! You mean to tell me that's the only way out of this place? Why can't we go out over the cliffs?"

"No can do," replied the Chinese, and was gone before Ross could question him further.

So that was it! The canon was the only way out of the basin, and Beebe was hiding down there, waiting to pot them as they came out. Quite a neat little idea! So that was why Virginia Carver was carrying that worried look.

Ross went straight to the girl. He found her in the dining-room.

"Miss Carver," he asked, "why didn't you tell me that Beebe was down in that canon?"

"Well, I couldn't see any use worrying you with that while you were so ill," she replied, smiling. "And then, too, Mr. Ross, I think you are a little inclined to do impulsive things, and it seems to me you have ran risks enough on my account."

Ross ignored this last.

"Then he really is there?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Ross, he is, and I am afraid that we are in rather a bad way. He has all the advantage."

"But isn't there any way out of this place except through that canon?"

"None at all. Uncle Arthur selected this place for that very reason. There was a trail up the cliff, but he dynamited that away. Unless we develop wings we'll go out through that canon or not at all."

Ross pondered for a moment. Finally he asked, "I wonder why he hasn't tried to kill Wong and me at night?"

"There are at least two reasons, I think," answered the girl. "The first is that Larson Beebe is a very cautious man. He will not risk a single hair of his head if it is not necessary. If he came up here he might get hurt. If he stays there he is perfectly safe and we haven't a single chance of getting by.

"Another thing, I think he is deathly afraid of Wong. He came up in the night twice and stole provisions. Since then Wong has been watching. I don't think he ever sleeps."

"Well, we can outlast him anyway, Miss Carver."

"But that's just what we can't do, Mr. Ross. Our provisions are very low." The girl was gravely serious now. "Unless we can find some solution, I'm afraid he is going to starve us out very soon. It looks like we were trapped."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WONG HAS AN IDEA

ROSS woke the next morning keenly aware of the seriousness of their predicament. As soon as breakfast was over he set out to examine the walls of the basin.

If he had any hope that there was a means of escape over the cliffs he was soon disillusioned. Nowhere was there a break in the walls. They were as perpendicular as a plumb-line and as smooth as basalt. Nothing but a fly could have scaled those cliffs.

The only way out led through the narrow twisting canon below. And there Larson Beebe lay in wait like a cat at a rat-hole. Ross realized that there was little or no chance for him or Wong to get through the canon alive. Beebe had all the advantage.

Ross returned to the house and sat down on the veranda. He ran over a dozen possible schemes for escape, and in the end he had to conclude that they were all impossible.

In fact, his only conclusion was that he would give what fortune he possessed to have Larson Beebe's neck within the grasp of his two hands. That, however, seemed to be a remote possibility. If anything, the situation would be reversed.

Ross had about exhausted his whole range of impossible schemes when Wong appeared on the veranda. The Chinese wore an enigmatical smile on his usually inscrutable face. It was patent that he was well pleased with something.

"You come," he addressed Ross. "Got something show."

Ross rose and followed Wong, who led the way to one of the 'dobe outbuildings. Opening the door, he motioned Ross to enter.

The room was a work-shop of sorts, but what instantly attracted attention were two enormous kites leaning against the wall.

"You see?" inquired Wong.

"Yes, I see," said Ross, "only I don't. What's the idea, Wong?"

"Mlisha Beebe kill everybody we go down canon. No can climb out. Wong make klite. Klite climb out."

"Guess I'm pretty thick, Wong. I don't get it yet."

"When Wong little bloy China he fly many klites. Not forget how. Fly klite now. Klite lift lope top cliff. We climb lope. Go 'way."

"By George, Wong, I believe you've got it," cried Ross in admiration. "But will it work?"

"Can do" nodded Wong.

"But how will you fasten the rope at the top of the cliff, Wong?"

"Wong good klite flyer. Two klites lift big loop. Drop loop over tree top side cliff. Two ends hang dlown. Mlake slip knot. Pull one lope. All done."

"Wong, you're a wonder! I believe it'll work. Worth trying anyway."

"Can do. Try tomollow if wind come."

Ross hurried away to find Virginia Carver.

"Miss Carver," he hailed her joyously, "Wong has got a scheme to get us out of here, and I believe it will work. He has constructed two enormous kites down there in the workshop. He claims they will lift a rope, and he says he can drop it over one of those stunted pines at the top of the cliff. We climb the rope and leave friend Beebe down in the canon to hold the bag. Are you game?"

"Of course I am," replied the girl, surprised that he should even question her gameness.

"I knew you would be. We're going to try it tomorrow. You had better make two packs of food."

"Two packs? Don't I carry anything?" asked the girl.

"Miss Carver," said Ross gravely, "it's a long way to civilization, and it is going to be a big tax on your strength to make it without carrying anything."

"I'll make it," said Virginia Carver, as she turned away.

The following morning Ross was eager for the experiment, but it was nearly noon before a breeze came up strong enough to lift the kites.

Virginia Carver came out, clad in flannel shirt, whipcord breeches and high laced boots. It was a costume well suited to the work ahead, but it accentuated the girl's slimness, made her appear almost frail. There was no frailty there, though. Rather was she supple with the suppleness of a braided cable, and the girl had the grace of a fine Toledo blade. Once again Stanley Ross became acutely aware that Virginia Carver had become an exceedingly important interest in his life.

Wong had instructed Ross in his scheme for escape. Ross saw at once that he had not intended to lift a rope heavy enough to hold a human being. Instead Wong had enearthed from one of the storehouses a very stout light line.

The plan was to lift the bight of the line with the two kites and drop it over a stunted pine growing out at an angle near the top of the north cliff. A heavier rope could then be attached to one end of this and drawn up and over the tree, making it possible to climb out.

Ross saw instantly that the plan was all right if the kites could be manipulated. That was Wong's job, and he seemed quite confident.

All three knew that they must work quickly. If Larson Beebe discovered their scheme there was no telling what desperate action he might attempt.

Wong and Ross quickly got the first big kite into action. It rose readily, but on attaining a height of fifty feet flopped drunkenly. It did not fall, however—merely dipped and darted. This did not appear to bother Wong at all. He simply gave the kite string to Virginia Carver to hold while he quickly flew the second kite with Ross's help.

Wong and Ross each took command of a kite now. Slowly paying out cord, they allowed the kites to rise. When the kites had risen to a height of about seventy-five feet the cords attached to the bight of the line suddenly became taut and the line began to rise from the ground.

It was then that Ross saw that as a designer of kites Wong most emphatically knew his business, for the instant the weight of the line was borne by the kites in that instant they ceased their drunken plungings and flew steadily.

Ross's heart leaped within him, for he knew now that Wong's scheme would work and that they were going to circumvent Larson Beebe. Up, up, the kites rose. A hundred feet! Two hundred! Five! A thousand!

The two kites were about thirty feet apart, and when it was obvious that the line was higher than the cliff wall Wong and Ross began to walk slowly forward. Their objective was a single low pine growing at an outward angle near the top of the cliff. Aiming carefully at this, Wong and Ross brought the kites to a position where an end of the line dangled on each side of the tree and against the cliff. The bight of the line was slightly above the tree, and the kites were pulling it forward.

"Missee, you grab ropes," shouted Wong.

Quickly divining what was wanted of her, Virginia Carver grasped the ends of the dangling lines.

"Let glo!" shouted Wong again.

Instantly he and Ross released the kite cords. The kites plunged drunkenly down out of sight over the top of the cliff The bight of the line dropped neatly over the pine tree and slid down its trunk to the roots. The thing was done!

Ross wanted to shout for pure joy. Elation showed in Virginia Carver's every feature. As for Wong, the author of this daring scheme, he merely grinned, and went swiftly to work.

Somewhere in one of the buildings Wong had discovered a coil of light rope. It had undoubtedly been brought in to be made up into lariats, for it was very pliable and exceedingly strong—strong enough to support the weight of a heavy man.

One end of this was fastened to a free end of the line over the tree. When Wong pulled sharply on the opposite end of the smaller line it slipped readily over the tree trunk. In a minute or two the end of the rope had been pulled up over the tree trunk and back to the canon floor. Thus was the light line replaced by the heavier one.

There was no place to anchor one of the rope ends so Wong simply tied a loop in one end of the rope, passed the other end through it, making a running noose, and quickly ran it up to the tree. Wong's kites had proved their worth. The means of escape was provided and ready.

"Wong go first," said the Chinese. Without argument or permission, the intrepid Wong was assuming the risk of proving the safety of the rope. By way of explanation he added to Ross, "You shoulda no stlong. No can pull Missee up, Wong can do."

Wong grasped the rope in his hands, and with the agility of a cat, feet on the canon wall, passed himself, hand over hand, up the face of the cliff. It seemed hardly a minute before he was at the top and had scrambled over the edge.

In a moment his head reappeared and he called down to Ross to send up the food packs, canteens, and blankets. This was but the work of a moment, and Wong quickly drew them to the top.

So far everything had gone well, and there was no sign of Beebe. It looked as though they were going to make good their escape.

When Wong let the rope down again Ross fashioned a loop in the end of it, which he passed over Virginia Carver's head and secured it under her arms.

"Now, Miss Carver, if you will take hold of the rope with both hands I think Wong can pull you up safely," he said. "If you hit against the cliff push yourself away with your feet."

The girl did not answer him, but she smiled confidently. She accepted her part in the escape with what appealed to Stanley Ross as being splendid courage.

Slowly but very steadily, Wong began to raise the girl. The little Chinese seemed to be made of steel, for, without stopping once or increasing or decreasing the speed, he drew Virginia Carver to the top of the cliff and helped her over the edge. It was a feat of which a man twice his size might have been justly proud.

When the rope came down again Ross lost no time. A hasty glance toward the mouth of the tiny canon revealed no sight of Beebe. Grasping the rope, Ross began his ascent.

His shoulder bothered him somewhat, but it was not more than two or three minutes before he, too, was at the cliff top.

They were free!

CHAPTER TWELVE

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING

STANLEY ROSS drew himself over the edge of the cliff, where Virginia Carver and Wong were waiting, and scrambled to his feet. He was exuberant

"Well, Miss Carver, I guess we're safe all right, thanks to Wong here," he exulted. "All that remains now is to make tracks away from this accursed place."

"So you think you're safe, eh?" snarled a cold voice.

Ross whirled to find himself facing Larson Beebe. Beebe was covering him steadily with a big automatic, and his deep set, piggish eyes had an insane light in them.

Ross's heart sank within him. He had expected an attack from Beebe from below, but that he might be waiting for

them on the cliff top never entered his head. He was utterly helpless now. Beebe had the drop on him and could kill him twice over before he could draw his own gun. Moreover, it was certain Beebe intended doing that very thing.

Ross was filled with a sense of futility, impotency. That he was about to die he did not consider. He was merely disgusted with himself for allowing himself to be checkmated when the game was practically won.

"So you thought you could get away?" Beebe was going on. It was obvious that he, too, was nearly insane. "Thought I was asleep, eh? I knew what was up as soon as I saw the kites. I could have got you then, but I figured the easiest and safest way would be to slip up here and wait behind a rock till you were all up. You wouldn't be looking for me and I could pot you easily. Well, I'm here and you're due for a long journey.

"Thought you could outwit Larson Beebe, eh? I'm just going to shoot you and your precious Chink friend here now and kick you over the cliff. Then I'm going to take Virginia and——."

Ross was conscious that Wong's right hand whipped to the base of his skull just above the collar of his blouse. In the same instant it came away again and now it held a long, thin, slender glittering blade!

There was another movement of Wong's hand so swift that he could not follow it. Ross only knew that a look of utterably blank amazement had overspread Larson Beebe's face. It was as though Beebe had seen a miracle performed before his eyes and could not fathom it.

Then, suddenly, Ross saw what had happened. The hilt of the knife that Wong had held was protruding from Larson Beebe's ribs!

For an instant Beebe wavered on his feet. His fingers relaxed and his gun clattered to the rocks. He pitched forward onto his face.

"Can do," muttered Wong. "One day kick Wong. Not kick again."

THAT NIGHT the three camped beside a little water-hole several miles down the main canon. Around the tiny campfire they made their plans for getting out of the desert.

Ross knew the general direction to take, and he felt confident that by taking it easy the girl would be able to make the journey on foot. Virginia Carver was confident.

The following morning Ross was awakened by footsteps on the rocks. He raised up to see two long-eared animals making their way down the trail to the water-hole. It was Archibald and Percy!

Ross let out a shout that instantly roused his companions.

"There's your ship of the desert that's going to carry you back to civilization," he called, as Virginia raised up from her bankets.

The girl did not comprehend. She gazed at the two animals in astonishment for a moment.

"But they're wild, aren't they?" she asked.

"Just as wild as two snails," said Ross. "Those two estimable gentlemen brought me into this desert, and they're going to take us out."

When breakfast had been finished Ross noticed that Wong was busily engaged in rearranging the weight of the packs.

"Never mind the packs, Wong. Friend Archibald here can carry Miss Carver and Percy can handle the supplies. You and I will go light, Wong," Ross explained.

"No can do," replied Wong. "Me no go you."

"What do you mean, Wong?"

"Wong go that way," answered the Chinese, pointing to the south.

"You go that way," asked Ross, perplexed. "Why? You're going with Miss Carver and me."

Wong shook his head. "Wong kill man. Think not stay in 'Nited States. Go Mexiclo."

"Nonsense, Wong," said Ross. "Miss Carver and I can easily fix that."

"Think not. Wong go Mexiclo. Got blother there. Buy li'le res'rant."

Ross saw that there was no use in trying to dissuade Wong. There was no combating such a nature. After a few moments Ross asked:

"Wong, where you going in Mexico?"

"Go Wa'lz."

"Going to Juarez, eh? What's your full name?"

"Name? Wong Chen Chek."

"All right, Wong. In about two months you go to the postoffice and inquire for a registered package. You'll find enough money in it to buy the best little restaurant in Juarez."

Wong grinned. "Thlank you."

Swinging his pack to his shoulder, he swung down the trail without more ado.

"Goo' bye. Goo' bye, Missee," came back to Ross and Virginia Carver.

A half hour later the Chinese disappeared from view far down the canon. Ross turned to the girl.

Virginia Carver was gazing far out over the jumble of rocks and sand that is the Red Desert to where the mists of the morning were dissolving into the shifting haze of the rising sun.

For a moment Ross watched her without speaking. Fresh and vibrant with youth, she was lovely beyond words.

"I guess we had best be going now," he said. Then his voice stumbled, "Miss Carver—Virginia—when we get out of here—I've—I've something to say to you."

For a long moment the girl continued to look far into the colorful haze of the desert. Then she turned toward Ross. A peculiarly tender little smile wreathed her mouth. Her eyes were swimming pools of unshed tears.

Her voice faltered, "Would—would you mind—saying it now—Stanley?"

THE END.

Chicago Man Attacked by Fighting Owl

JOHN CASEY, night watchman for the Chicago Protective Agency, while "walking his beat" one night recently, entered a dark passageway in West Madison Street; and then, all at once—

"Something flew at me from the darkness," he said later, "and knocked my cap off and began scratching my face and clawing out my hair by the roots. I made a pass at it, but found I was fanning the air. Then I saw two blazing eyes, and struck at them. Before I could get out my gun the monster jumped on me again. I managed to swing on it with my night-stick—and that ended the fight."

To substantiate his story, Watchman Casey exhibited a dead owl measuring thirty-six inches from tip to tip, also numerous cuts and bruises on his hands and face.

A Powerful Novel of Sinister Madmen That Mounts To An Astounding Climax

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***By* HAMILTON CRAIGIE**

CHAPTER ONE

SOUTHWEST OF THE LAW

ALL THE WAY Westward in the smoker the man in the high-crowned, black Stetson had taken no part in the conversation. He had appeared to doze, slumping in the high-backed seat as the train rushed onward into the golden afternoon.

The three men at his back had been busy with an interminable round of poker: draw, jack-pot, and stud; deuces wild, and seven-card peak. They moved across the aisle now, as the long train slowed for the brief stop at Two-Horse Canyon, facing him obliquely and a little to his left.

Twice or thrice they had essayed to draw him into the talk, but the man in the black Stetson had been oblivious; he had continued taciturn—morose, almost, one might have said. But he had not been asleep; rather, he had listened with all his ears as their voices had reached him between hands:

". . . . Yes—Dry Bone—been there myself—they run things pretty much to suit *themselves* . . . Wide-open . . . Sure . . . You might call it a dead

open-and-shut proposition, I'll tell a man!"

The laugh that followed had come to the man in the black Stetson with a curious, grating note:

"Sure-thing gamblers; con-men—it's a regular crook's paradise . . . And there's that fellow, Rook . . ."

The eyes of the man in the black Stetson narrowed abruptly at the corners; for a moment, as a curtain is drawn swiftly from right to left, something arose to peer out of those eyes, glowing, deep-down, like a still, festering flame. But it was gone upon the instant—

". . . And there's that fellow, Rook . . ." the man had said.

Of a sudden he had stopped short as if he had been muzzled; presently his voice had come again, dry, matter-of-fact:

"I'll see that raise, Carpenter, and it'll cost you just twenty iron men to call. . ."

Plainly, that name, "Rook," had been taboo; the speaker had been silently reminded of it.

The man in the black Stetson—he had been known as Black Steve Annister in the back blocks at Wooloomooloof before he had made of that name a by-word in the honkatonks and the gambling-hells from San Francisco northward to the Wind River country, and beyond it—Black Steve Annister was sitting upright now, but he had retired behind a wide-spread copy of the *Durango County Gazette*. He was not reading it, however, although he was looking through it—at the three men just across the aisle, studying them through the pin-pricks he had made in it, himself unseen.

Annister had arrived in New York only the week previous from Sourabaya, Java, and he had not waited even overnight before he had begun the long journey, broken at Washington for half a day, which had taken him now half way southwestward across the State of Texas. Presently the long train would cross the Pecos, beyond it the serrated ramparts of the Guadalupes; Dry Bone was just between.

Annister, studying the men, frowned abruptly, yawning behind his hand. Two of the men he put down for ranchers—sheep men, probably; there was about them none of the glamor of that West which lingers even now in the person of a cattleman; and these men were negligible.

But the third man would have been noticeable anywhere. He was a bull's bulk of a man, hard-featured, mouth a straight gash above a heavy chin barbered to the blood; the observer across the aisle would have said "cowman," and registered a bull's eye with it, point-blank.

The two who were with him, evidently with interests in common, were scarcely friendly with the cowman, if such he was; it was evident in their attitude, the constraint which had fallen upon them following that mention of "Rook."

But the man in the black Stetson continued to study the big fellow through the holes in his newspaper: the hard face, tanned a rich saddle color; the nose, flattened to a smudge of flaring nostril; the cauliflower ear.

He had heard the name, "Ellison" once or twice; somewhere, deep down, it had set vibrating a chord of memory that brought with it, incongruously enough, an altogether different setting: a padded ring under twin, blazing arcs; the thud and shuffle of sliding feet; a man, huge, bruitish, broad, fists like stone mauls, yet, for all his bulk, a very cat for quickness. . .

He put down his paper now—to find those hard eyes boring into his. Ellison, or whatever the man's name was, had shifted in his seat; the glance that he turned now upon the stranger in the black Stetson was searching, probing. There was a truculence in it, a fierce, bright, avid staring, like an animal's, savage in its very directness, like a challenge—which in effect it was.

Annister returned the look, eye for eye, with a bitter, brooding insolence in which there was apparent a certain mockery, his eyes in a veiled gleaming, like the sun on water. For a long moment their glances engaged, in a silent duel, like rapier points; then the giant with the cauliflower ear vented a sound between a grunt and a snort, turning to the window, his gaze outward across the flat levels of the adjacent prairie in a kind of sightless stare.

There had been no reason in it—no logic—that Annister could see, but for the moment he had owned to a sudden sense of crisis; it had seemed to him for a moment that in the giant's eyes there had been almost a knowing, an understanding look. But the man could have no business with him—of that he was certain.

The fellow was just a bully, probably, a big, hulking lump of beef who resented, as it might chance, Annister's undeniably cosmopolitan air; the sardonic flicker in the gray-green eyes; the cool, contemptuous appraisal. But, after all, it had been the giant who had begun it.

And yet, somehow, Annister was thinking that he had seen him before, and, oddly, illogically enough, he found himself liking the man—why, he could not have told.

Black Steve Annister, "with the heart of a cougar and the conscience of a wolf," as a disgruntled enemy had at one time phrased it, could have sat into that game had he been so minded, with profit to himself, pecuniary and otherwise, but he had preferred to play the hand that had been dealt him. Later, at Dry Bone, that would be another matter.

Now, his lean, strong, hawklike face darkened abruptly with the thought behind his eyes, and then—for Annister had eyes in the back of his head—he was suddenly aware that the conductor was advancing along the aisle.

The three men opposite had ceased their conversation as if at an order. Two or three of the remaining passengers stared curiously, after the manner of their kind (they were small tradesmen, merchants, going on beyond the border to Tucson), as the conductor halted at Annister's elbow.

"Excuse me, Mister—Mister—" he began.

"—Annister!" The answer was low, even, controlled, but beneath the silken tone there ran a hint of iron.

"Mister Annister," repeated the conductor. "Will you—just a moment, please?"

Annister rose, following the official outward toward the vestibule. And as he went he could feel those eyes, avid, curious, boring into his back. He permitted himself the ghost of a cold grin as the conductor, turning in the entry, laid a respectful hand upon his sleeve.

"I'm—sorry, sir," he said, low. "You getting off at Dry Bone, aren't you?"

The words were less a question than a statement of fact. Annister nodded. The conductor, a tall, bronzed man who might have been an old-time line rider, shot a quick glance over his shoulder. Then he said, his tone even, matter-of-fact:

"I—*wouldn't*—if I was you."

Annister stared. Then, producing his cigar-case, lighting a long, black invincible, the twin to which the conductor had selected, he remarked casually:

"They're good cigars. . . In the trenches we smoked 'Woodbines'—a cross between tar-heel and alfalfa; you have a lot of alfalfa out here, eh? And the 'third light,' as we used to call it, most always got his—three men lighting up from the same match, you know."

His tone abruptly hardened; the glance that he turned upon the conductor now was like a lance of flame.

"Well—I'm not superstitious—but—will you tell me *why?*"

It is significant that the conductor was breaking a ridged Company rule by joining Annister in a surreptitious cigar. Now he turned guiltily as a voice sounded from the corridor at his back:

"Ex-cuse me—but could I trouble you for a light?"

The third man, as Annister could see, was tall and heavily built, with broad shoulders and a curiously small head. He had a sharp, acquisitive nose, and a mouth tight-lipped and thin. Annister, versed in reading men, was abruptly conscious of an instinctive and overmastering repugnance. For the man's eyes were cold and cruel, sleepy-lidded, like a snake's, roving between Annister and the conductor in a furtive scrutiny.

The match was still alight. Annister, his hand steady as a rock, extended it to the newcomer, who, with an inarticulate grunt, lighted his cigarette, turning, without further speech, backward along the corridor.

Annister waited a moment until he was certain that the man was out of earshot. Then:

"The 'third light,' eh?" he murmured, his tone abruptly hardened. "Well—and why shouldn't I get off?" he asked, grimly.

The conductor for a moment seemed at a loss.

"It's like this, Mr. Annister," he said slowly. "I'm a new man on the S. P., but I've been hearing a lot—no gossip, you understand—but a conductor hears a good deal, by and large . . . And this is a cow country, or it used to be—pretty wild, in spots. Dry Bone, now—they run things pretty much to suit themselves—"

He paused, in a visible embarrassment.

"There's a party of four back there in the diner—I couldn't help overhearing what they were saying, and—well—I'm just repeating what they said, and no offense—"

"That's all right," interrupted Annister, evenly. "Go on."

"Why—they said," continued the conductor, "that you were an Eastern gambler—a—confidence-man—that you were not wanted here in Dry Bone; that it wouldn't be exactly healthy for you if you stopped off—that's all. I thought you'd be wanting to know. And if you'll take my advice, even if you haven't asked it, I'd say: go on to Tombstone—you can figure it out from there."

"Thanks," answered Annister shortly. "I'm getting off—at Dry Bone. How soon are we due?"

"Fifteen minutes," replied the conductor, glancing at his watch. "But if I was you, sir, I'd stay aboard; it's a bad crowd there, as I happen to know, and they've got a branch of the S. S. S. there, only they work it to suit themselves: tar-and-feathers is just a picnic with that gang; they're a stemwinding bunch of assassins, I'll say! So far they've operated under cover, mostly, and down here in the Southwest—well—it ain't a lot different, in some ways, than it was thirty years ago. You'll see—because they're—"

"—Southwest of the Law—is that it?" Annister laughed shortly. "Well—much obliged, old-timer," he said. "I won't forget it. But I'm getting off."

The long train was slowing for the station stop. Annister, striding to his seat, got down his heavy bag. For a moment he stood, considering, his gaze, under lowered lids, upon the long coach and its passengers in a swift, squinting appraisal.

The three men were gone.

Somehow, they had found out who he was. Well—that made little difference, he reflected, grimly, except to force matters to a show-down, and the sooner the better.

For there was a man in Dry Bone; Annister had known him in the old time; and it was with this man, unless he was greatly mistaken, that his business had to do.

He would put it to the touch, then; he would sit into the game, and would come heeled, and they could rib up the deck on him, and welcome.

He was turning to the door when, of a sudden, there came to him a second warning: there was a swish of skirts, a sudden odor of violets. Annister had a glimpse of a blonde head beneath a close-fitting toque, as the girl passed him, disappearing in the doorway.

And there, on the flooring at his feet, was a square of white.

Annister, stooping, retrieved it, holding the card upward to the light:

"Stay on board. Dry Bone is not safe—for you. Be warned—in time."

There was no signature. Annister made a little clucking sound with his tongue, his face set like flint. He was alone in the car.

The train had stopped now as, bag in hand, he shouldered through the doorway. And then, abruptly, as if materialized out of the air, a face grinned into his, lips drawn backward from the teeth in a soundless snarl. It was the big man with the cauliflower ear.

"Hombre," he said, without preamble, in a hoarse, carrying whisper, "take an old-timer's advice: go back—*an'* set down—you savvy? This place—it ain't exactly healthy for a young fellow like you, I'm tellin' yu! For if you don't—"

Annister's cold stare was followed by his voice, low, incisive:

"You're blocking the doorway," he said, with a sort of freezing quiet.

The giant's hard mouth twisted in a sneer; his great paw reaching upward with a clawing motion, blunt fingers upon Annister's shoulder. Then—what followed happened with the speed of light.

"You can't get off here, Mister—" the giant was continuing, when the words were blotted out. Annister's right fist, behind it the full weight of his two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, curved in a short arc; there was a spanking thud. The big man, lifted from his feet, crashed into the front door-frame, slumping face downward in an aimless huddle of sprawling limbs.

"The hell you say!" grinned Black Steve Annister, leaping lightly to the platform, with never a backward glance.

Such was the manner of his coming.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HAND IN THE DARK.

THE ONE HOTEL in Dry Bone was the Mansion House.

Annister, crossing the lobby, was aware of a veiled hostility in the stares directed at him from the group of loungers in the doorway; they gave ground grudgingly, as he came in, with a sort of covert truculence.

Here, as he could see, there was a curious mingling of the Old West and the New: men, whose attire would have created no remark, say, even in New York; others, booted and spurred, cartridge-belted and pistolled—but all, as he noticed, with, for headgear, the inevitable Stetson.

Once in his room, and the door locked and bolted, he busied himself for a moment with a sheaf of papers, several of them adorned with a huge, official seal; they crackled as he put them in an inner pocket. Then, dressed as he was, he lay down upon the bed, but not to sleep.

It was late—hard upon midnight—when the sound for which he had waited came with the soft *whirring* of the window-weights. The sound was not loud; it would not have awakened him had he been asleep; but Annister could hear it plainly enough.

He had removed his shoes upon retiring. Now, in his stocking-feet, he approached the window, a black, glimmering oblong against the windy night without. As he watched, the faint *whirring*

ceased; a pair of hands appeared suddenly out of the darkness, fingers hooked into the window-sill.

Annister drew a faint, hissing breath. In the star-shine, for there was no moon, the fingers showed in a luminous grayness against the sill, clawlike, malformed, like the talons of a beast, which in effect they were.

Annister knew them upon the instant, for, in far-off Java, for instance, he had seen those hands, or, rather, the same and yet not the same. And in that instant he had acted.

Both hands upon the window-sash, he brought it down with a crash upon those fingers; there followed a yelp of pain, inhuman, doglike—a groaning curse—the slam of a falling ladder—a heavy thud—silence.

Annister smiled grimly in the darkness. Whoever it was, the intruder would never be certain as to whether that window had crashed downward of its own accord, or not. And leaning in the window, Annister raised it cautiously again after a moment. He heard presently the slow drag of retreating footsteps; after all, it had not been much of a drop.

Closing and bolting the window, he undressed in the darkness, and with the facility of an old campaigner was asleep and snoring beneath the blankets between two ticks of the watch.

But in the morning a surprise awaited him.

Always an early riser, he was breakfasting alone in the empty dining-room when the waitress brought him a note. Beyond noting that she was pretty, and that she did not look like a waitress, Annister, somewhat engrossed in the business in hand, for a moment stared at the envelope with unseeing eyes.

Then, ripping it open, he took in its contents in one swift, flashing glance:

"My dear Mr. Annister:

"I would be very glad to see you at my office at ten this morning—if you are able to be there."

It was signed simply: "Hamilton Rook."

Annister grinned fleetingly in answer.

"Well—it's not another warning, at any rate," he said, half aloud, turning to the consideration of his breakfast bacon. Then, at a low voice at his back, he turned:

"Did you—say your coffee needed warming, sir?"

It was the waitress.

Annister had turned the note, face downward, on the table, with a quick flirt of his thumb. How long she had been there behind him he could not tell, for he had heard no sound.

"Thanks—no," he said shortly, his hard eyes boring into hers with an almost insolent appraisal.

Yes—she was pretty, and more than that, her violet eyes darkening now under his abrupt, almost savage scrutiny. And her voice—it was like a bell just trembling out of silence. Annister spoke:

"Have you been here long—in Dry Bone, I mean?" he asked.

The waitress smiled, and it was not the smile of a waitress, Annister was convinced. Now, with a girl like that for a partner—was his unspoken thought—he could—well . . .

"N-no, sir," the girl made answer, with a sudden affectation of primness. "I came in yesterday, sir— on the same train with you, sir. I—I've just been—engaged."

Annister repressed an absurd prompting to ask her how many times she had been engaged before, and to whom and at what. Her eyes were assuredly hypnotic, with lashes long and delicately fine.

"Umm," he rumbled in answer.

Was it possible, after all, that she had been the girl in the crimson toque? And, with the card in his pocket, for a moment he was tempted to show it to her. Instead:

"Well—I hope you like it here," he said. "You'll know me—the next time?"

And for a moment he could have sworn that in the face of the girl there had come all at once a curious, almost a baffling look, at once enigmatic and self-revealing. But the entrance of the vanguard of breakfasters interrupted.

He watched her for a little as with a swaying, lilting step she moved off to minister to the late-comers, his eyes speculative. Then, turning once more to the letter, he re-read it as a man reading a cipher:

"If you are able to be there." Could there be a double meaning in that? For if Rook had sent that midnight visitor, then there were no lengths indeed to which he might go—for the hand, like a beast's paw, upon the window-sill, had been, as Annister had known upon the instant, the hand of the Thug, the Dacoit, the Strangler.

Warnings, thrice repeated; a hand in the dark; a waitress who was not all she seemed; an invitation, suave, and, as Annister conceived it, ironic—it was a situation not without its possibilities for action.

And Black Steve Annister loved action. Perhaps, after all, he was to have it now, whether he would or no.

Rook he had known aforetime, but he was convinced that the latter would not recognize him save as Black Steve Annister, wastrel of the wide world, gentleman adventurer-in-waiting to the High Gods of Adventure and Derring-do, knight-errant of the highways and byways of Criminopolis, scarce a black sheep, indeed, but a wolf of the long trail and of the night.

Rook had known him as such in the days when, as jackal for certain vested interests, the black-bearded lawyer had run foul of young Annister, just then beginning a hectic career of spending which, but three years in the past, had abruptly terminated with Annister's complete disappearance from joyous jazz-palace and discreetly gilded temple of high hazard.

For he had dropped out of sight, lost, as a stone is lost, in the sea-green waters of oblivion, save for an occasional ripple threafter which proclaimed him blacksander, beachcomber, *chevalier d'industrie,* until one memorable evening a twelve-month gone . . . but Rook would be knowing nothing of that.

Annister had come home from the South Seas to find his father gone, and a note: *"Do not look for me, for you are not my son."* And an exhaustive inquiry had failed even to suggest the slightest clue.

The elder Annister could have written his check for seven figures, and it appeared, following his disappearance, that he had done so; they had come in from North and South and East and West, steadily, and, as it seemed, with purpose. But as a clue to his whereabouts they had been unavailing.

But, from the moment of his discovery of that note, Black Steve Annister, visiting a certain office in a certain side-street not far distant from the Capitol, had surprised its guardian with a terse:

"That offer of yours, Childers—I've come to take it up."

The man called Childers had bent a keen look upon his visitor; another might have described it as unpleasant, stern.

"Well, you know just what that means, eh?" he had said. "You'll be merely a cog, a link—remember that!"

"Yes," Annister had answered, and there the interview had ended.

And so Black Steve Annister, serving two masters, had come to Dry Bone, and the end, as it might chance, of the long trail leading Westward into the setting sun.

He rose from the table now, going out into the pale Spring sunshine on his way to the office of Hamilton Rook. He found the building presently; it was the court-house; there was a figure of Blind Justice with her scales just over the entrance. Annister reflected sardonically that, here, in Carter County, distant from a civilization at present as remote as the moon, she was probably also deaf—and dumb. And presently, at the head of a dark flight, there was the office, with the legend:

HAMILTON ROOK
ATTORNEY AND
COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW

There was a small sign at the corner of the door; in obedience to its invitation to "Walk In," Annister, his hand upon the knob in a noiseless pressure, abruptly flung it wide.

A split second before the opening of that door, and while his hand was on the knob, Annister had seen, or thought that he had seen, a swift shadow pass suddenly across the ground-glass panel; there was the grating sound of a chair being moved backward.

Then, standing in the doorway, Annister's eyes narrowed; he stood rigid, tense.

For the man facing him across the stained and battered desk, lean head like a vulture's set upon wide shoulders; mouth like a straight gash with its thin, bloodless lips; cold eyes fixed upon him in a silent, ophidian brightness—was—the "third light," as he had called him—the man whom he had met for a moment back there in the smoker of the Transcontinental.

CHAPTER THREE

BEHIND THE ARRAS

"MISTER ANNISTER," greeted the man at the desk. "You didn't know me, eh? Well—it's a long time—three years—and my beard—" he passed a bony hand across his chin—"I sacrificed that long ago; it is scarcely the fashion. Now—" he waved a hand, indicating a chair at his left—"sit down, won't you? We can—talk better so."

Annister seated himself, his eyes upon the cold eyes just across. That the man who sat there had inspired those warnings he had little doubt; that he had sent that midnight assassin against him, he was convinced. And yet—he was at a loss to find the reason.

Rook was not aware, could not be aware, of a certain fact known only to himself, Annister, and a certain man just then twenty-five hundred miles distant in that dim office hard by the Capitol; it was beyond the bounds of possibility. No—it could scarcely be that, he told himself.

And of a sudden a cold rage shook him so that he trembled; his hands, flat upon the desk-top, balled suddenly into fists. This man—this suave, secret knave with the eyes of ice, and the implacable, grim mouth—sat there now, removed from him merely by the width of the narrow desk. And if it were true, that which he suspected, then this man, this jackal, this Prince of Plunder with the heart of a hyena and the conscience of a wolf—why, he had earned his quittance a hundred times over.

The flat black shape of the automatic hung in a sling under his left arm-pit—Annister had forgotten that. He knew merely that he was face to face with the man whom he had come twenty-five hundred long miles to meet; he saw him now as through a crimson mist. And for the moment the careful plan that he had made—that, too, was forgotten, lost in the almost overmastering impulse to drive his fist into that face so close to his, the cold eyes, the pallid, sneering mouth . . .

Something of this must have showed in his face, plainly visible to the man who faced him across the desk.

There was a semi-twilight in the room even by day. Now the lean head thrust forward like a striking snake; there came a sudden, brief explosion of movement, a darkening flash, as the hand, holding the heavy automatic, swung upward level with his visitor, point-blank.

At such a distance it would be impossible to miss.

There was a curtain just behind him; Annister had noticed it upon entering. Now at his back it rippled suddenly along its length as if at the passage of a heavy body just behind. The lawyer smiled thinly.

"Ah, my friend," he said, "it is so easy to be indiscreet! And one must meet force with force. This—it is theatrical, if you like—but—it is just a little demonstration of my—preparedness. I thought—you see . . ."

There came a sardonic flicker in the nearset eyes; the voice purred now in the semi-darkness like a cat's:

"I must protect myself . . . There are—reasons . . . You see, I thought, for a moment, that you—ah—meditated a resort to—violence. And violence is something that I deplore, my friend; and here I am surrounded by violent men, 'sudden and quick in quarrel,' as the poet has it; sometimes they are difficult to control."

Annister had himself in hand. The veiled threat with which the lawyer had ended bothered him not at all. Now, casually as it seemed, but with the lightning riposte of a duellist, his hand reached out; there came a sudden wrench, a twist, a snarling oath from Rook; and Annister, pocketing the pistol, smiled grimly now in answer.

"Now—'we can talk better so'!" he mocked. The balance of power, ha? Now, let me tell you something: You left the big town—for your health; that was three years ago, wasn't it? I didn't recognize you, but it was a pretty close shave, at that!"

He laughed, but there was a ring of menace in it. His hard eyes held the pale ones of the lawyer with a chill malevolence.

"Rook," he said, low, "you're as crooked as a ram's-horn; you're a bent twig; I wouldn't trust you this side of hell further than I could see you, and not even then. Now—" his voice cracked suddenly in the thick silence like the cracking of a whip—"you had the infernal gall to send me—here—*after* you'd have accounted for me—*by the left hand*, ha?

"I left that window open, because, if you want to know, I was expecting something of the sort. And now—"

The hand holding the pistol became rigid as a rock.

"—I want the reason *why*—in a holy minute, Mister Hamilton Rook—or else—"

For a heart-beat the face of the lawyer seemed swollen to a poisonous whiteness; the veins in his neck and temples stood out in ridges. Then—the long, spatulate fingers spread wide with a curious, flicking motion, thumbs downward; the curtain bellied outward suddenly as if in answer.

Abruptly Annister felt for a heart-beat a something that was like a cold wind blowing upon the back of his neck, and it was a wind of death. Something slid past his shoulder with the speed of light; talons of steel, thumbs downward, pressing at the base of his brain. He heard a hoarse, whistling croak—a sound that was nothing human. Then—

There is but one answer to that strangler's grip, and it is a secret known only to a few. Annister had learned it, no matter where, and in the learning he had paid . . .

Now, an infinitesimal split second before the beast paws had encircled his throat, his forefinger and thumb had flashed upward, hooked, as steel gaff is hooked, between those fingers and his throat.

There followed a straining heave; a cry, inhuman, beastlike, like the mewing of a cat. Annister, rising to his feet,

leaned abruptly to the left—straightened, with one quick, explosive heave of his powerful shoulder-muscles—and the body of his antagonist catapulted over his head.

Flung clear of the desk, he landed, heavily, on one shoulder-point, twitched a moment, lay still. It was the "flying-mare," and none but a master could have summoned it.

Annister turned the unconscious man over with his foot.

"*Jivero!*" he muttered, between set teeth.

He shivered slightly in the humid air of the warm room. For the man was an Ecuadorian savage—a jungle-beast; once, in Quito, Annister had seen two or three: flat-faced, rather handsome savages; how or where Rook had acquired the fellow only the lawyer could have said.

According to his savage code, he had been faithful—as a tiger is faithful to his trainer, his keeper. Annister, brave as he was, would have preferred a rattler, a fer-de-lance, for company. He turned now with an abrupt movement to Rook, who, slumped in his chair, sat staring at the huddled figure of the Indian where he had fallen.

"Now," said Annister, "I've a notion, Mister Hamilton Rook, to shoot first, and ask questions afterward . . . However, I confess I'm still a trifle curious as to your motive—more so, since this second pleasant little interlude with your man Friday here. Now—may I ask you—*why?*"

The lawyer's lips were moving, fumbling together, without sound. Fingers trembling, like a man in a fit, at length he lifted dull eyes to his interrogator:

"This," he enunciated thickly, gesturing toward the huddled figure on the carpet. "It was to save my—life—that is the truth, Annister—you must—believe. The reason—for the others . . . I did not know it was you there in the smoker; I thought—that is—" he appeared to breathe of a sudden like a man who had been running—"we had a report—that you were quite another man—one who was—ah—would be antagonistic, in fact, to certain operations—and so—"

He spread his hands wide with a little, flicking gesture.

"—That is why—but now, of course, you will understand—?"

"Yes," answered Annister, bluntly. "I understand. You thought I was—an operative, ha? Well—I'm not—that kind of an operative. But—" his manner became all at once sharp, incisive; the gaze that he bent upon Rook was the shrewd look of a man who sees his opportunity ready to his hand. Cunning was in that look, and an infinite guile; the lawyer did not miss it.

Here was something that he could deal with. He had known of Annister's reputation as of old; it had been none of the best, certainly, and with that knowledge now there came a measure of reassurance. And if he was any judge of men, here was one whom he could use: the acquisitive gleaming in the eyes; the hard, incisive mouth, the predatory, forward-thrusting tilt of the head—if he, Rook, was any judge of men, here was a man whom he could use.

Old Travis Annister had disinherited him: the son who had been a waster in the far places of the earth—that was an added reason. And at the thought there came a pale gleaming in the lawyer's close-set eyes, like the sun on water. Travis Annister . . . and Travis Annister had disappeared . . . well, of course, he had heard of it. His voice reached the younger man in a purring whisper:

"As I have hinted, Mr. Annister, I am interested in—certain operations; shall we call them—speculative? For some time now I have been in need of a sort of silent partner, or, rather, the Doctor—"

He caught himself with a *click* of his strong, white, even teeth. Annister's face continued impassive, save for the keen eyes, veiled now under lowered lids. Rook continued:

"Annister," he said suddenly, as if he had abruptly come to a decision, "I'll lay my cards on the table with you: I need a man, and he can not afford to be too—scrupulous, do you understand? The—the doctor tells me I have been overdoing it." He gave a faint, wintry smile. "We are—out of the beaten track here—southwest of the law, as you might call it . . ."

He lowered his voice to a faint, hissing sibilance:

"I will expect you to ask no questions. You have been a cow-man; there are certain interests to the north and the north-east of us; I am naming no names, understand? There is a good deal of range left, as you know, and—now, listen to me . . ."

His voice went on. For perhaps five minutes Annister listened in a heavy silence. And all that time, although the lawyer had not once called a spade a spade, the thing that he had unfolded was clear enough:

It was the old story; with something of a novel twist. First, there were the outfits scattered north and north-east, as Rook had said. The running off of a few cows, for instance, re-branding, and the rest of it—it was an old story to Annister—but there was something more. Annister, as he listened, realized that the thing was big, worthy, indeed, of the keen, devising brain that had evolved it.

A good many of the ranches had, for some time past, been owned and operated by the packers themselves; three of these: the Bar T, the Cross Circle L, the Flying U, were northward from Dry Bone scarce a hundred miles. But there were still other outfits. And, as Annister listened, he was hearing again a name, or, rather, a symbol, the name and the symbol of masked and hooded violence, and it was "S. S. S."

Rook, it appeared, was the moving spirit of it, in Dry Bone, at any rate, but as the tale unfolded Annister, putting two and two together, supplied for that cryptic symbol a name, nation-wide and respected: the name of a great Company, an Octopus indeed, which, with Hamilton Rook as its agent, planned nothing less than the ruthless despoiling of those independent cattle men who, out of a desert of sand and sage, had won a living for their stock and for themselves, the rear guard of the order, now, as it seemed, indeed, caught in the far-flung tentacles of a monster, unscrupulous and without soul.

Annister's part in it was to be simple. He was to do nothing as yet until the lawyer should give the word. But a man was wanted: a gun-fighter; a man bred to violence who would not consider too closely the method or the means. For, as Rook had said, his eyes upon Annister in a sudden, biting scrutiny:

"If, as a first step, say, the owners of these outfits should—ah—disappear. ."

There was to be no outright violence, it appeared; murder—that was an ugly word; but it was of course possible that there might be—resistance. But—there would be a fortune in it.

Annister's part would be comparatively simple. He would merely carry out his orders. Rook, eying him now in a close-lipped silence, watched as a spider watches from his ambush. Annister would be needing money; if the lawyer knew his man, and he thought that he did, here was something that would be a lever, and a powerful one.

Annister lifted his head, then he brought his hand, palm downward, to the desk-top. It was a movement, slow, even, controlled.

"I'm with you," he said.

"Good!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Now—I want you to go over to the club; there are a few men there I'd like you to meet. *Ha!*"

At his exclamation Annister, turning, followed his rigid, pointing finger.

The huddled figure on the carpet had disappeared. There had been no sound, no sign. The Indian had vanished.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FACE IN THE MOONLIGHT

ANNISTER had thrown in with Rook, but he trusted him no further than he would have trusted a cougar, a mountain cat.

At the club, as the afternoon wore on to evening, he had met four or five men: Beaton, the county judge, a red-faced tippler with, on the surface, a heartiness that was repellant; Lunn, the hotel proprietor, a vast, asthmatic man with a small, porcine eye; Daventry, the Land Commissioner, whose British accent, Annister noticed, would on occasion flatten to a high, nasal whining that was reminiscent of Sag Harbor or Buzzards Bay.

The rest, hard-faced, typical of their environment, Annister put down for the usual lesser fry; hangers-on, jackals, as it might chance, "house-men," in the parlance of the "poker-room"—Annister knew the type well enough.

They seemed hospitable, but once or twice Annister had thought to detect in their glances a grimly curious look: of appraisal, and of something more.

There had been a game going, but he had not sat in, nor had the lawyer invited him. The visit had been meant, plainly enough, as a sort of introduction.

"We're all here," Rook had said.

But it was apparent, too, that there were one or two others who were absent; Annister heard several references to "Bull"; but for the most part there was a silence, beneath which Annister could feel the tension; it was like a fine wire, vibrating, deep-down; almost, he might have said, a certain grimly quiet anticipation of that which was to come.

Presently the telephone tinkled, loud in the sudden stillness; Annister could hear the voice at the other end: harsh, strident, with a bestial growl that penetrated outward into the close room.

"He can't come," came from the man at the telephone. "Bull—yeah—an' I reckon he seems some disappointed."

Annister noticed that the tension had all at once relaxed, and with it, as he could see, there was plainly visible in the faces about him a certain disappointment. It was as if they had been waiting for something—something, well, that had not materialized. There was a laugh or two; a word stifled in utterance; one or two of the men, glancing at Annister and away, gave an almost imperceptible head-shake. Even Rook, as Annister could tell, appeared relieved as the newcomer rose, turning to the company with a conventional good-night.

For just a split second it seemed to Annister that something *was* about to happen; for a moment he saw, or fancied that he saw, a quick, silent signal flash, then, from eye to eye; Lunn, the hotel man, had half risen in his chair; out of the tail of his eye, as he was turning toward the door, Annister was aware of a quick ripple, a movement, the shadow of a sound, like the movement of a conjuror manipulating his cards, white hands flashing in a bewildering passade.

But nothing happened.

Leaving, he had walked slowly toward the hotel, turning over in his mind the story that had been told him by the lawyer. And there was one more question he wanted to ask him: a question that had to do with a square of paper that he had come upon among his father's papers in New York, for it had been this chance discovery that had sent him, post-haste, to Dry Bone, and the lawyer's office.

Thinking these things, he was turning the corner to the hotel when, out of nowhere as it seemed, a man had passed him, walking with a peculiar, dragging shuffle. Seen under the moon for a moment, this man's face had impressed itself upon Annister: it was dark and foreign, with high cheek-bones, and—what seemed curiously out of place in Dry Bone—a black moustache and professional Van Dyke.

Annister, watching the man, saw him turn into the doorway he had just quitted; it was the entrance to the "club"—two rooms above a saddler's shop at the corner of the street.

Halting a moment to look after the man, Annister was wondering idly who he might be—certainly not the man called "Bull," if there was anything in a name. And then, abruptly, he was remembering what the lawyer had let fall about the "doctor"; perhaps that was who he was; he had had a distinctly professional air.

The man's eyes had lingered upon Annister for a moment, and for a moment the latter had been conscious of a curious shock. For it had been as if the man had looked *through* rather than at him; those eyes had glowed suddenly in the darkness, gray-green like a cat's, in an abrupt, ferocious, basilisk stare.

Annister, in his day, had seen some queer corners and some tight places; in Rangoon, for example, he had penetrated to a certain dark house in a dim backwater stinking and dark with the darkness of midnight even at high noon.

And it was there, in that dark house, with shuttered windows like blind eyes to the night, that he had seen that which it is not good for any white man to have seen: the rite of the Suttee; the bloodstone of Siva, the Destroyer, reeking with the sacrifice—ay—and more.

And something now, at that time half-perceived and dimly understood, came again with the sight of the dark face with its high cheek-bones, and black, forking beard; for he had seen a creature with a face and yet without a face, mewling and mowing like a cat, now come from horrors, and the practitioner had been—

The man who but just now passed him at the corner of the street, the man with the dark, foreign visage, and the eyes of death.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARTNERS OF THE NIGHT

ANNISTER, pausing a moment at the corner of the street, was conscious of a feeling of coldness, like a bleak wind of the spirit, as if death, in passing, had touched him, and gone on.

For the face of the man whom he had seen had been like the face of a damned soul, unhuman, Satanic in its sheer, visible malevolence. So might Satan himself have looked, after the Fall.

Somehow, although the man had looked straight ahead, seeming to see merely with the glazed, indwelling stare of a sleepwalker, Annister had felt those eyes upon him; he was certain that he had been seen—and known. But now he had other things to think about.

He had intended going to the hotel. Now, on an impulse he bent his steps away from it, turning to the building in which were the offices of Rook.

But he did not enter by the main doorway. There was an alley further along; into this he melted with the stealth and caution of an Indian, feeling his way forward in the thick darkness to where, as he had marked it earlier in the day, there was a rusty fire-escape; its rungs ran upward in the darkness; they creaked now under his hand as he went slowly up.

Rook's office was on the second floor. Annister, reaching the window, found it locked, but in a matter of seconds had it open, with the soft *snick* of a steel blade between sash and bolt; the thing was done with a professional deftness, as if, say, the man who had opened that window had done that same thing many times before.

Now, crouched in the darkness by that dim square of window, the intruder stood silent, listening, holding his breath. A

sound had come to him, faint and thin, as if muffled by many thicknesses of walls; it penetrated outward from the private office, with the snick and slither of rasping steel on steel.

And at the instant that Annister, with a grim smile in the darkness, recognized it for what it was, he knew, too, that someone had been beforehand with him; someone interested, also, in Hamilton Rook; for the sound that he heard now, loud in the singing silence, was the sound of a steel drill upon a safe.

Annister had seen that safe; it was scarcely more than a strong-box, a sheet steel, but thin; a "can-opener" could have ripped it from end to end, easily, in no time at all. Rook must feel secure indeed, he thought, to put his trust in so flimsy a repository unless, perhaps, he had other means. The Indian, for instance; the savage who, but a few hours ago, had missed with his long talons for Annister's throat by inches.

But somehow Annister did not think that the Jivero would be on guard. There was no burglar-alarm protection; he had made certain of that; but the man who was now busy with that safe must have come up by the stairway; doubtless he was on familiar ground. Perhaps he might be some disgruntled confederate of the lawyer's; well, he'd have a look-see, at any rate.

Advancing silently, on the balls of his feet, Annister traversed the length of the outer office, peering around the doorway to where, under the dim glow of a single drop-light, a figure, back toward Annister, knelt before the safe.

The drop-light, carefully shaded, would not be visible from without; under its cone-shaped radiance Annister could see merely that the man was wearing a cap, pulled low over his forehead; but something in the attitude of that kneeling figure: the turn of the head, the deft, darting movement of the hand, was strangely familiar.

Annister grinned in the darkness at the same moment that he was aware of a curious contraction of the heart. This lone-hand cracksman worked evidently without confederates, unless, possibly, he might have a lookout posted on the sidewalk below. He spoke, barely above a whisper:

"Hello!" he said. "Pretty careless, aren't you? Now, do you think it's—safe?"

The figure whirled; the hand, holding an automatic, came upward with the speed of light; then dropped limply at her side as the girl surveyed him with a stony look.

It was the waitress of the Mansion House.

"Well," she said, "you've caught me, but it looks to me as if I beat you to it, Black Steve Annister. . . Oh, I've heard of you, Mister Black Steve. . . Well, now you've caught me, what are you going to do about it?"

The darkly beautiful face was scornful; the violet eyes, under the light, stormy with a something that Annister could not all define.

Annister bit his lip. To find her like this! And, all at once, realization came to him with a sudden tightening of the heart.

This girl, waitress or not, crook or not—he had to confess that, in all his wanderings up and down the earth, he had never met her like. A girl in a thousand, he had decided, back there in the dining-room of the Mansion House. What a partner she would make! Now, with a girl like that for a partner. . . !

On a sudden impulse he leaned forward, his eyes upon the safe door; it swung outward now; somehow she had opened it.

"Pretty smooth," he commented. "The combination, after all, ha? You worked it. Now, before *we* have a look, I want to tell you something. I—I'm looking for a partner, Miss—ah—Miss—"

"—Allerton," she told him, in her eyes a sudden, leaping spark, the brief, baffling, enigmatic look that he had seen back there in the hotel dining-room. But it was gone again even as she spoke:

"All right—partner!" she said, low. "When do we start?"

"Right now!" answered Annister, his gaze upon the girl frankly admiring. He had expected the usual feminine evasions, a play for time, hesitation—anything but this ready acquiescence in his abrupt proposal.

He was not entirely sure of her; his admiration for her beauty, her poise, had nothing to do with the cold judgment whispering now that the whole affair might, after all, be a blind, a trap, devious and crooked as the devious and crooked turnings of Hamilton Rook.

But with Annister to decide was to act.

Bending, he swung wide the safe door, groping forward with exploring hand. His back was toward the girl; consequently he did not see the sudden, revealing gleam in the violet eyes, the quick hardening of the mouth. Swinging forward his pocket flash, the light danced, glimmering, upon a packet of papers, a sheaf of documents. Annister, running over them swiftly, gave a quick exclamation, his hand, in a lightning movement, palming something which he secreted in an inner pocket.

He turned sidewise to the girl.

"Lord!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Nothing but papers! Partner, we're out of luck!"

Evidently the girl had been oblivious. Now, however, her quick, flashing fingers sorted the contents of that safe as with a practiced hand, to leave them, as had Annister, inviolate, save for that oblong of paper reposing now in the pocket of his coat.

In the shadow of the entrance it was black dark as they parted. The girl did not live in the hotel, she told him; that had been a part of her plan. They would meet again, of course. But once in his room, and with the shades drawn and the door locked and bolted, Annister, taking the paper from his pocket, smoothed it out under the light.

He looked; then looked again, breath indrawn sharply through clenched teeth.

For that paper was a canceled check; it had been drawn to "Cash"; and the signature, in a hand that he knew upon the instant, was the signature of his father, Travis Annister.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LIVING GHOST

ANNISTER had heard nothing from Rook other that that he had been again invited to a further session of the "Club" for that evening.

Alone in his room on the morning following his adventure in Rook's office, his eye had been caught and held by a news item printed on an inside page of the *Durango County Gazette;* he had nearly passed it over; but now the lines leaped out at him as if they had been blazoned across the paper in a double-column spread:

Travis Annister Still Strangely Missing—Retired Capitalist Gone Since January—Foul Play Feared

And, separated from it by the width of a single column, he read:

Retired Banker Disappears—Newbold Humiston a Suicide?—Friends Fear for Safety

But it was at a third item, tucked away in an obscure corner that Annister stifled a quick word in his throat. Newbold Humiston had been a friend of his father's; it was an odd coincidence, to say the least of it. And the story went on to say that three other men, all nationally known, had, so to speak, between suns, disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

And that third news item, irrelevant as it might have been, told of an incident, odd and unusual enough; it had happened in Palos Verde, distant from Dry Bone a long twenty miles of hazardous mountain trail:

A man had come in, in rags and tatters; at first they had thought him a desert rat, a prospector, light-headed from starvation, for his incoherent babble had proclaimed him no less a personage than Rodman Axworthy, prominent banker of Mojave. The sheriff of Palos Verde, on the off chance, had wired Mojave, and the word had come back that Axworthy had been missing; they were sending a man.

With the arrival of this man, however, the mystery deepened, for it appeared that the derelict was indeed Axworthy, and yet not Axworthy at all, for whereas the true Axworthy had had a high, aquiline nose and a wide, generous mouth, the derelict was snub-nosed, swarthy, where the banker had been fair; he was, simply, another man.

But there had been this about it: on the banker's left forearm, underneath, there had been a curious birth-mark; the derelict had spoken of it, but upon examination the arm showed smooth and bare. The investigator from Mojave had been obviously skeptical until, abruptly, the ragged claimant had taken from his pocket a curious, removable bridge; a dentist in Mojave who had made it, he said, could identify it. It fitted perfectly.

This looked like proof, but the thing was obviously impossible. And then, as "Axworthy" was being taken back to Mojave, he went suddenly stark, staring crazy, repeating over and over, with reference to the bridge:

"It's the one thing they didn't get—the one thing. . ."

And there the matter rested, save that, upon arrival in Mojave, the bridge was found to be missing. The emissary from Mojave seemed to remember a dark-faced stranger who had been seated opposite them in the train, but that was all; the man had jostled against his charge upon alighting; the last proof, if indeed it might be called a proof, was gone.

Annister frowned thoughtfully, his mind upon that canceled check in his pocket. And he was remembering one other thing, and that was the square of paper which he had found among his father's effects, for on it had been a name, or, rather, two: the name of Hamilton Rook, and of another, unknown to Annister. And as to that Axworthy case, it was common knowledge that lunatics, for instance, entertained frequently the delusion that they were people of importance. There was nothing new in that.

Somehow, it seemed to him that he held in his hands the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle that, even if put together, made but a patchwork of motives and design, which yet, if he could but find the key, would be as clear as crystal.

That paper found in his father's office; the interview with Childers, at Washington; the long trip westward; the warning message on the train; the big man with the ice-blue eye and the square jaw of a fighter; the attack in the hotel; the meeting with Rook, and the meeting with the girl; the finding of that canceled check—and, last, the matter of those queerly related news items just under his hand—these made a pattern to be unraveled only by the warp and woof of Fate.

And the chance meeting with the bearded stranger at the corner of the street; consider how he would, Annister's mind kept turning backward to that meeting and those eyes that were like the eyes of a damned soul, malignant, cold, in their abysmal, cold cruelty of discarnate Evil.

Discarnate! That was it; that would express it; for the man, as he recalled him, seemed somehow less than human; there had been about him an aura, an emanation, that was like a tide rising from the depths, from darkness unto darkness. . .

Annister was scarcely superstitious, but he was again conscious of that icy chill; he shivered, as a man is said to shiver when, according to an ancient superstition, someone is said to be walking over his grave.

He rose, walking to the window, to peer outward into the sunwashed street. The coil was tightening; he felt it; and he was but one man against many. And knowing what he knew, or suspecting what he suspected, it seemed to him all at once that the sunlight had flattened to a heatless flaming of pale radiance; there seemed a menace in it, even as there seemed a menace in the very air, a waiting, a tension, like a fine wire drawn and singing at a pitch too low for sound.

Abruptly he heard a sound; it was like the scratching of a rat in the wainscot, faint and thin. His door was locked.

Now, looking at it, the knob turned, slowly, stealthily. He could see it turning.

Then, faint but unmistakable, came a knock.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THROUGH THE DOOR

THE KNOCKING was not loud; it was merely a discreet tap; but there was a quality of hurry in it.

Annister, moving without sound on the thick pile of the rug, almost with the same motion turned the key and flung wide the door.

At first he could see nothing. The corridor, thick-piled with shadows even at high noon, showed merely as a darkling glimmer out of which there sprang suddenly a face, like a white, glimmering oval; a voice came, with a quick, hissing sibilance:

"*Ssh!* Quiet! I must not be seen! Or else he. . . Close the door!"

The girl stepped inward swiftly, her white face turned to the man before her in a sort of frozen calm. Annister had a vague impression of having seen her somewhere before: that golden head beneath its close-fitting toque; the faint, remembered odor of fresh violets; the face, with a piquant loveliness just now, however, white and drawn; it was like a strain of music, heard and then forgotten.

Closing the heavy door and locking it, he turned swiftly to the girl.

"Well—?" he said, his gaze upon her in a cold, searching scrutiny. "Isn't this a trifle—*sudden?*"

But the girl lifted a stony face.

"I have little time," she said, with a curious, spent breathlessness, as if she had been running. "I am Cleo Ridgely, secretary to Hamilton Rook—that is, *I was;* I am his secretary no longer, but he does not know about it—yet."

She paused, again with that hard-held breathing, moistening her stiff lips.

"I warned you that day on the train; do you remember? I warned you because I knew Hamilton Rook. . . I know him even better now. He meant to kill you, Mr. Annister, and now he schemes—"

"—To use me—is that it?" interrupted Annister dryly; then, at her slow head-shake, he stiffened.

"He would have finished you even after your—agreement—but that is not his way. But he will not make use of you in the way that you think. That careful plan of which he told you—that was just a blind; there are no ranches near enough. The S. S. S.—that, too, was just a part of the story. You see, he wants to keep you here, that is all, until such time as he thinks it necessary to—remove you. But his real motive, his actual plan I know nothing about. I may suspect, but I do not *think* about it."

She paused again, her expression rigid, as there sounded a faint, half-audible footfall from the corridor without. It passed.

"He would—kill me—if he knew," she continued tonelessly. "That warning on the train—I did that at his order. If he could have frightened you off, he would have been satisfied with that, but now, it will be—different. I tell you this on my own account. And now—" she laid a slim hand on his arm—"don't go to that rendezvous tonight, Mr. Annister. Ellison will be there; you remember him? He was the man who tried to keep you on that train."

She smiled faintly with her lips, but her eyes were sombre.

"Ellison is Rook's jackal, just as Rook is—"

The sentence was never completed. There came a coughing grunt from just outside the door, a streak of flame from the half-open transom just above; the girl stiffened, her face went blank; she slid downward to the rug, even as Annister, snapping back the lock, had flung wide the door.

Gun out, he burst into the corridor, as, from the shadows at a far corner, he fancied that he heard the faint echo of a taunting laugh.

But there was no one there.

Rushing to the stair-head, he found nothing, nobody. The man who had fired that shot had used a silencer; he had disappeared, either into one of the bedchambers to right and left, or down the stair. But it was no time for speculation. The girl would be needing attention, if, indeed, she was not already past all aid.

Annister had wasted no time. But, for a heart-beat, as he raced backward along the hall, his eye was caught and held by the quick glint of metal from the carpet at his feet. Stooping as he ran, he swept up the object, possibly an empty shell; then, on the threshold of his room, recoiled with a gasping oath.

For the girl had vanished!

Stunned, Annister stood silent, mechanically unclosing his stiff fingers upon the object which they held. He stared at it now, rigid with remembrance, and a growing fear.

Oddly twisted and distorted, its dull gold surface glinting dully under the light, the thing that he had found lay on his open palm.

It was a dentist's bridge.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ODDS—AND THE MAN

ANNISTER had been absent from that room not longer than ten racing seconds. It was unthinkable that the girl had vanished of her own volition, even had it been physically possible.

Glancing around the room, he saw that the windows were closed and bolted; the flooring was solid, substantial; there could be no ingress save by the door through which he had just come.

There was another door; it led to the next room; but Annister, with a habit of inbred caution, had tried it, and found it locked. Now, in two swift strides, he had covered the space between, had tried that door, setting his weight against it as he turned the knob.

Under his weight it gave outward with a sudden slatting clatter. They, whoever they might me, had unlocked it; it had been through this adjoining room that they had taken the girl.

Annister, glancing swiftly around this room, saw that it was obviously unoccupied; the bed had been made up; there was no sort of clue that he could see. The invisible assassin had had a key; that was it, of course.

But as to the rest of it, Annister could only speculate. It was an impasse, and a mystery.

Going downward to the dining-room, as it was now past noon, he glanced toward the desk, but if he had had any thought of reporting the attack upon the girl, or her disappearance, he thought better of it; he would keep his own counsel; a decision helped by a sight of Lunn, the hotel proprietor, who, lounging at the desk, raised his sleepy-lidded, vulture gaze at Annister as the latter was turning toward the dining-room.

Annister, in that brief glance, thought to detect in those eyes, milky-pale, a veiled, sardonic flicker. If, behind this latest happening, there was the fine, Italian hand of Hamilton Rook, Lunn was in cahoots with the lawyer, of that there could be little doubt. For, as Annister was convinced, there had been a menace in those eyes half turned to his, an insolence, a bright, burning truculence, that, as he turned into the long dining-hall, brought the swift blood to his cheek in a dark tide.

But at his table another surprise awaited him. Mary Allerton was gone. The heavy-handed Swede who served him told him that she had left, suddenly, that morning; a message had come for her, it appeared, but the substitute could tell him nothing further. Annister let it go at that.

Rising from the table, he went outward to the long bar, a cool, pleasant oasis, indeed, in the fierce heat of the drowsy afternoon. He greeted the bartender, a tall man with the wide shoulders of a cowman, with a smile.

The man had been friendly; in fact, he had been the sole friend that Annister appeared to have made since his arrival in Dry Bone. Now the bartender leaned forward, speaking in a whisper behind his hand:

"Watch your step, Mr. Annister," he said.

Annister gave an almost imperceptible nod. Then, his drink before him upon the stained and battered mahogany, he glanced sidewise along the rail, to where, at the far end, two men stood together, eying him under lowered brows.

To Annister it seemed that there had fallen a sudden quiet. Just prior to his entrance he had heard talk and laughter, the *clink* of glasses, a thick, turgid oath. Now there appeared to rise and grow a tension, as of something electric in the air; Annister felt it in the white face of the knight of the apron, the sudden silence, the rigid figures of the two men at the end of the long bar.

Behind him, and a little to his left, three men were seated at a table: Bristow, sheriff of Dry Bone, a big man with a bleak, pale eye, and a mouth like a straight gash above a heavy chin barbered to the blood. With him were two others whom he did not know.

Lunn was nowhere in sight.

The taller of the two men standing at the bar turned, and Annister recognized him as Tucson Charlie Westervelt, a gunman with a dangerous record. Westervelt was wearing a high-crowned, white Stetson; Annister marked it at the distance, beneath it the fierce, hawklike face, turned now in his direction, the thin lips set stiffly in a sullen pout.

The old West had passed with the passing of the *remuda*, the trail herd, the mining camps; the wide, free range of the long-horned cattle was no more; but Dry Bone had not changed save that the loading-pens had gone; a cow would be a curiosity. But the lawless spirit of the ancient West remained. "Southwest of the Law," indeed, Dry Bone was a law unto itself, and now about him Annister felt the menace; it appeared that he had walked into a trap.

The judge, the sheriff—what mockery of law there was—Annister knew that it would be against him, either way, attacking or attacked. He was certain of it as Westervelt, moving slowly along the bar, halted when perhaps three paces distant, elbow raised, right hand extended, clawlike, in a stiff, thrusting gesture above his guns.

It was the gesture of the killer, the preliminary for the lightning downthrust of the stiff fingers; Annister knew that well enough. Now the gunman's gaze, sleepy-lidded like a falcon's,

bored into his; his voice came with a snarling violence:

"*Mister* Black Steve Annister," he said, without preamble. "I understand you're some wizard with a canister, ha? A bad hombre! Musta been a little bird done told me, an' that bird was sure loco, I'll tell a man! But *me*—" his tone hardened to a steely rasp—"I'm not thinkin' you're such-a-much!"

It was a trap; Annister knew that now, just as behind the gunman he could almost see the dark face of Rook, with its sneering grin; the lawyer had inspired it.

His automatic hung in a sling under his left arm-pit, but even if he could beat Westervelt to the draw, he knew well enough what the result would be: a shot in the back, say, from the men sitting just behind, or—arrest, and the mockery of a trial to follow it. Either way, he was done.

His own eyes held the gunman's now, glancing neither to the right nor to the left. He was conscious of a movement from the three men at the table; Westervelt's companion, a short, bowlegged man, with the pale eyes of an Albino, had stepped backward from the bar; Annister felt rather than saw his hand move even as his own hand came up and outward with lightning speed; flame streaked from his pistol with the motion.

Once in a generation, perhaps, a man arises from the ruck who, by an uncanny dexterity of hand and eye, confounds and dazzles the common run of men. As a conjurer throws his glass balls in air, swifter than eye can follow, so Annister, crouching sidewise from the bar, threw his bullets at Westervelt.

The gunman, bending forward at the hips, crashed to the sawdust in a slumping fall, as the Albino, firing from the hip, whirled sidewise as Annister's second bullet drilled him through the middle. For the tenth of a second, like the sudden stoppage of a cinematograph, the tableau endured; then Annister, whirling, had covered Bristow where he sat; the two men with him, white-faced, hands pressed flat upon the table-top, stared, silent, as Annister spoke:

"You saw, Bristow," he said, low and even, his eyes upon the cold eyes of the sheriff in a bright, steady, inquiring stare. "Now—what about it?"

For a moment a little silence held; then Bristow, moistening his stiff lips, nodded, his gaze upon Annister in a sudden, dazed, uncomprehending look.

"All right, Mr. Annister," he said heavily. "They came lookin' f'r it, I reckon. . . Well, you were *that* quick!"

Annister smiled grimly, pocketing his pistol. Westervelt lay where he had fallen, a dead man even as he had gone for his gun, lips still twisted in a sullen pout. The bowlegged man, stiff fingers clutching his heavy pistol, lay, face downward, in the sawdust. The bartender, with an admiring glance at Annister, leaned forward as Bristow and the two men with him went slowly out.

"They may try to get me for it, Mr. Annister," he said, "but I'm no man's man; well, not Rook's, and you can lay to that! Bristow and his friends kept out of it, you noticed? Bristow'll do nothing, *now;* not yet a while, at any rate, but—mebbe they sort of savvied me a-watchin' t' see they didn't run no whizzer on you!"

He lifted the heavy Colt, where it had lain hidden by the bar-rail, thrusting it in its scabbard with a grin.

"Well, sir, I *aimed* t' see that they was sittin' close, *an'* quiet, Mr. Annister," he said.

"Thanks, old timer," said Annister. "I'll not forget."

But as he went outward into the waning afternoon he was thinking of that rendezvous of the night. For Rook would be there, and it had been Rook, he was certain, who had engineered that ambush in the Mansion House bar.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BATTLE IN THE "CLUB"

THE TIME was nearly ripe. The clue of those newspaper items; the canceled check; the somewhat repellant evidence of the battered piece of goldwork picked up in the corridor of the Mansion House—Annister had been able to put two and two together, to find a sum as strange, as odd, say, as five, or seven, or even one.

But that name that had trembled on the lips of Rook's secretary remained a secret; with it, Annister was convinced, he would be able to pull those threads together with a single jerk, to find them —one.

He had had news from Mojave: the dentist had identified the insane man as his patient by means of his chart, but, with that face, the man could not be Banker Axworthy—it simply could not be. And yet he was!

It was something of a riddle, and more, even, than that, for the thing savored of the supernatural, of necromancy, of a black art that might, say, have had for its practitioner a certain personage with the eyes of a damned soul and a black, forking beard, curled, like Mephisto's; Annister thought that it might.

Further, the conductor of that train had been able to describe, somewhat in detail, the man who had jostled the derelict and his companion; the man had been a stranger to the conductor; he had been tall and thin, with a small, sandy moustache, and a high-arched, broken nose, and he had been wearing the conventional Stetson. The fellow might have been disguised, of course, but if Annister could find the black-bearded man, discover his identity, he was reasonably certain that he would not draw blank.

It was no certainty, of course, but it was worth the risk, he told himself. It would be a desperate hazard that he was about to face, he knew. Thinking of his father, together with the remembrance of that unholy and unspeakable horror that he had witnessed, born of the stinking shadows of that dark street in a city foul and old, its people furtive worshipers of strange gods, Annister felt again that crawling chill which had assailed him with the passing of the tall man with the eyes of death.

With Annister, to decide was to act. Dispatching a brief telegram in code to a certain office in a certain building in Washington, he went now to keep his rendezvous with Rook and the rest. It was yet early, scarce eight in the evening, and the street was full of life and movement, before him, and behind.

And before him and behind, as he went onward, he was conscious that those who walked there walked with him, stride for stride; they kept their distance, moving without speech, as he turned the corner of the dusty street.

If he had had any doubt about it, the doubt became certainty as, wheeling sharply to the left, they kept him company now, still with that grim, daunting silence: a bodyguard, indeed, but a bodyguard that held him prisoner as certainly as if the manacles were on his wrists.

It was not yet dark, but with a rising wind there had come a sky overcast and lowering; low down, upon the horizon's rim to the eastward, the violet blaze of the lightning came and went, with, after a little, the heavy salvos of the thunder, like the marching of an armed host.

But Annister, his gaze set straight ahead, turned inward at the entrance of the saddler's shop, mounting the stairs, as, behind him he heard the heavy door slam shut.

Perhaps it had been the wind, but as Annister went upward he heard, just beyond that door, the murmur of voices; they reached him in a sing-song mutter against the rising of the wind, in a quick, growling chorus.

There had been something in that snarling speech to daunt a man less brave than the man on that narrow stair, but Annister went upward, lightly now,

to meet whatever waited behind the door set with its narrow panel that he could see merely as a dark smudge of shadow in the encircling gloom.

He rapped, twice, and the door fell open silently, disclosing the long room in which, as he remembered, he had sat, but a few nights in the past, to listen as the lawyer and his crowd had waited for the man called "Bull."

The room was brightly lighted. At a long table, midway between door and windows, five men were seated: Lunn, his fat face gray with a sort of eager pallor, was chewing nervously at an unlighted cigar; he glanced up now at Annister's entrance, turning to a big man on his right. At the head of the table, his veiled glance like the stare of a falcon, sat Rook, but it was upon the big man next to Lunn that Annister's glance rested with an abrupt interest as the lawyer spoke:

"Welcome to our city, Mr. Annister!" he said, in a voice that reminded Annister of molasses dripping from a barrel. "I want you to meet—Mr. Bull Ellison; he's been right anxious to meet you, haven't you, Bull?"

Annister, in the passage of an eye-flash, understood. This was the man whom he had encountered in the vestibule of the smoker, and, of a sudden, memory rose up out of the past, and, with it, a picture: a padded ring under twin, blazing arcs; the thud and shuffle of sliding feet; a man, huge, brutish, broad, fists like stone mauls, yet, for all his bulk, a very cat for quickness.

"Bruiser" Ellison, they had called him then; a heavyweight whose very brute strength had kept him from the championship; that, and a certain easy good nature which was not apparent now in the bleak staring of the eyes turned now upon Annister, remorseless, under lowered brows.

Now, as if at a signal, the men about the table rose; the table was hauled backward to the wall, leaving a wide, sanded space under the lights.

And then, even as Rook spoke, Annister abruptly understood: this gang of thieves, as he knew now—"Plunder, Limited," as Cleo Ridgley had called them—Annister knew them now, under the leadership of Rook, for an outfit which would stop short of nothing to attain its ends. His eyes, roving the long room up and down, searched now for that dark face, with its black, forking beard, but he was not really expecting to see it, but that, if Rook was the actual leader, Black Beard was "the man higher up," Annister was, somehow, convinced.

They had failed with Westervelt and his *segundo;* now, as the man called "Bull" came forward across the floor, Rook spoke:

"Ellison hasn't forgotten his meeting with you, Annister; he says you played him a dirty trick; hit him when he wasn't looking; that right, Bull?" he asked, with a certain sly malice directed at the giant with the cauliflower ear.

"And now," Rook's purring tones continued, "he wants satisfaction; he'll get it, won't he, Mister Annister?"

For a moment, as Annister's eyes bored into his, the lawyer's face showed, like an animal's, in a Rembrandtesque shading of high light and shadow beneath the lights. Stripped of its mask, it was like the face of a devil; now the mouth grinned, but without mirth, the lips drawn backward from the teeth in a soundless snarl. He laughed suddenly, and there was nothing human in it, as Annister, his back to the wall, smiled grimly now in answer.

He had been somewhat less than discreet, he reflected; Rook's purpose had shown in his eyes; he, Annister, had walked into a trap from which, this time, there could be no escape. He had meant to beard them to their faces, wring from Rook an admission as to his father, perhaps more; then shoot his way out, if need be.

But now—he would have to fight this giant, a ring veteran of a hundred battles, with bare fists, surrounded by an encircling, hostile cordon, who, if by any chance he might prove the victor, would see to it that he paid for that victory with his life.

Annister knew that it was on the cards that Rook, for instance, would shoot him down as remorselessly as a man would squeeze a mosquito, say, out of life between thumb and finger. But it was the lawyer's humor, doubtless, to see him manhandled, perhaps killed beneath the drumming impact of those iron fists.

Calmly, he removed his coat, bestowing his automatic in the pocket of his trousers. He did it openly, turning to face Ellison, who, stripped to an athletic undershirt and trousers, regarded Annister with a grinning assurance.

He was big; perhaps twenty pounds heavier than Annister, with wide shoulders and a deep arching chest; with his forward-thrusting jaw and bullet head, with its stiff fell of pig's-bristles, the long arms like a gorilla's, he towered over his antagonist like a cave bear, a grizzly waiting for the kill, and like a cave bear, at Rook's snarling call of "Time!" he was upon the lesser man like a thunderbolt, fists going like flails.

Annister, in his day and generation, had absorbed the science of hit, stop, and getaway under masters of the art who pronounced him, as an amateur, the equal of many a professional performer of the squared circle; he was lean and hard, whereas Ellison's waistline showed, under the thin shirt, in folds of fat.

If the onlookers expected to see Annister annihilated by that first, furious rush, they were mistaken. Crouching, lightly, on the balls of his feet, he drove forward a lightning straight left, full on the point. Ellison, coming in, took it; grunting; the blow had traveled a scant six inches, but there had been power in it.

It set him back upon his heels, from which, as he rose, raging, he dove in with a ripping one-two punch, which, partly blocked by his antagonist, yet crashing through the latter's guard, landed high upon his cheek-bone with a spanking thud.

It had been a grazing blow; otherwise, the fight might have ended then and there. Annister, backing nimbly before the giant's rush, realized that he must avoid a clinch; at in-fighting the giant would have the edge; those mast-like arms and massive shoulders, the huge bulk—they would, at close quarters, with the drumming impact of the great fists, have spelled a quick ending with the sheer, slugging power of the attack.

He heard Rook snarl as, side-stepping like a sliding ghost, he countered with a long, curving left.

So far, he had been holding his own. If he could keep the giant at his distance, he might wear him out. For this was not a fight by rounds; a professional pugilist, fighting in the pink, would have had bellows to mend at the end, say, of five minutes of a give-and-take encounter moving at high speed.

Circling, feinting, ducking, Annister kept that long left in his adversary's face, forcing the pace, yet keeping out of harm's way save for an overhand swing, which, landing high up upon his cheek-bone, turned him half round with the impact, throwing him off balance to a slumping fall.

Up like a flash, however, he ducked, dodged, evading those mighty arms that strove desperately to reach him through that impenetrable guard.

A fight with four-ounce gloves can be a bloody affair enough, but with nature's weapons, under London Prize Ring rules, it can be a shambles. Armed with the cestus or the mailed fist, Ellison might have wreaked havoc as a gladiator of old Rome punished his adversary to the death. As it was, Annister, his face a bloody mask, where that socking punch

had landed, gave Rook and his supporters heart of grace.

"Take him, Bull!"

The screaming advice was in the high voice of Lunn; the others echoed it. But if Annister was in desperate case, the giant, sobbing now with the fury of his spent strength, was weaving on his feet.

Legs like iron columns upbore that mighty strength, but a pile-driving right, behind it the full weight of Annister's two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, sinking with an audible *"plop!"* in his adversary's midriff, brought from the giant a quick, gasping grunt.

Ellison's endurance was almost done. He could "take it," but, hog-fat from a protracted period of easy living, professional fighter as he had been, this amateur, with the arching chest of a greyhound and the stamina of a lucivee of the long trail, was wearing him down.

Trading punch for punch now, Annister abruptly cut loose with pile-driving right and lefts; they volleyed in from every angle; there was a cold grin on his lips now as he went round the giant like a cooper round a barrel, bombarding him with a bewildering crossfire of hooks and swings, jabs and uppercuts.

Annister, at the beginning of the fight, had expected the usual tricks of the professional: holding in the clinches; butting; the elbow; the heel of the hand against the face; but Ellison had fought fair.

Now, as the giant, boring in against that relentless attack, faltered, mouth open, labored breath sucked inward through clenched teeth, Annister stepped backward, hands dropping at his sides.

Ellison, almost out, stood, weaving on his feet, fronting his adversary, a queer look of surprise in his face, and a something more. Annister, strangely enough, as has been mentioned, had, in spite of his encounter with Ellison in the smoker, conceived something for the man that had been close to liking. Somehow, rough as the man was; crooked, by all the signs; the tool of Rook and of his minions, he had the blue eye of a fighter—the straight, level look of a man who, though an enemy, would yet fight fair.

Annister, breathing heavily, thrust out his hand.

"A draw, ha?" he said. "Well—suppose we let it go at that."

For a moment Ellison appeared to hesitate; there came again the queer look in his eyes, as of surprise, wonder, and a something more. There came a grating curse from Lunn; a sudden movement from the onlookers roundabout.

Ellison's great paw closed on the extended hand with a grip of iron, as Rook's voice rose, strident, under the lights:

"Bull—are you crazy? This man—he's just—a dam' *dick!*"

CHAPTER TEN

"IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!"

IT WAS OUT. Rook, his hand in a lightning stab for Annister's coat, turned over the lapel, holding it forward for all to see.

On it was a small gold badge—the symbol of the Secret Service. The secret was a secret no longer.

How long Rook had known of it Annister could not be certain, but now, at the growling chorus of swift hate, he whirled. His pistol came up and out, as there came a startling interruption, or rather, two.

He heard Ellison's voice, roaring in the narrow room:

"Hell's bells, young fellow, I'm with you, and you can lay to that! For this once, anyway! You sure can handle yourself!"

He turned to Rook and the rest. "Now— you bums, get goin'! Dick or no dick, I'll play this hand as she lays. Get goin'!"

The great hand, holding a heavy Colt, swung upward on a line with Annister's as the door burst inward with a crash; and, framed in the opening, there showed on a sudden the flaming thatch of the bartender, Del Kane.

His cowboy yell echoed throughout the room, eyes blazing upon the hotel man where he sat.

In two strides, he had joined Annister and Bull; guns on a line, the three fronted the five who faced them, silent, tense. Kane's voice came clear:

"I followed you, Mr. Annister; thought they'd try t' run a whizzer on yuh; I'm pullin' m' freight after today, anyway; Mister Lunn can have his job, an' welcome! Now—I ben keepin' cases on Mister Rook, he's a curly wolf, aint you, Rook? A real bad hombre, an' you can lay to that! But he ain't goin' northwest of nothin', he ain't. . .Now, you dam' short-horns, show some speed!"

But there was no fight in Rook, Lunn and Company. Glowering, their hands in plain sight, weaponless, they sat in a sullen silence, as Annister, backing to the doorway, was followed by Ellison and Kane. Outside, under pale stars, the giant spoke:

"I don't aim to be too all-fired honest, Mister Annister," he said. "I throwed in with Mister Rook, that's so, but he's played it both ends against the middle with me, I guess. . . I reckon I'll be movin' out o' Dry Bone in two—three hours."

He grinned, wryly, out of the corner of his mouth.

"You sure pack a hefty wallop, young fellow! I wish I could tell you somethin', but that man Rook, he's as close-mouthed as an Indian, and that's whatever! His game—nobody knows what it is—Lunn, maybe—but they sure got a stranglehold on th' county; it won't be healthy for me here after tonight."

The three men separated at the hotel, Annister entering the lobby with a curious depression that abruptly deepened to a sudden, crawling fear as a call-boy brought him a note. The fear was not for himself, but for another, for, although he had never seen the handwriting before, he knew it upon the instant.

Ripping open the envelope with fingers that trembled, he read, and at what he saw his face paled slowly to a mottled, unhealthy gray:

"Partner:

"If you get this in time, please hurry. I'm in the toils, at Dr. Elphinstone's—it's the stone house at the right of the road leading north from Dry Bone—twenty miles, I think. I've bribed a man to take this to you, and if he fails me, God help me!—God help us all! If you fail me, you'll never see me again—as Mary Allerton, because the Devil's in charge here, and they call him the Jailer of Souls. I'll be watching for you, at the south window—you'll know it by the red ribbon on the bars. And now—be careful. If you get here at night beware of the guards—there are three. And if it's night there'll be a rope hanging from the window—you can feel for it in the dark. Now hurry.

"MARY ALLERTON (No. 33)."

"You'll never see me again—as Mary Allerton." Annister was aware again of that crawling fear. *"The red ribbon on the bars."* The place was in effect a prison, then.

But—*"No. 33"!* Annister's heart leaped up. He knew the meaning of those numerals well enough; he had been blind not to have suspected it. But *"Dr. Elphinistone,"* and *"The Jailer of Souls!"*

Who could be the jailer of souls but the Devil? And Annister fancied that he had seen the Devil at the corner of that street under the moon, with his black, forking beard, and the cold eyes of death.

The trail was warm now, as he thought, but—if he were too late? He

put the thought from him, turning to the perusal of a telegram in code which he had found waiting for him at the desk; translated, it read:

"With you Thursday with four, six, twenty-one, and the others. Look for thirty-three.

"CHILDERS."

But there was no time to be lost. Thursday was tomorrow. He would have to take his chance of their finding him, for there was nobody whom he could trust. Ellison had gone, even if he might have chanced the giant in so delicate a matter; Del Kane, likewise. He must take his chance. Striding to the door, he stiffened abruptly at a drumming rap, and a hoarse voice in the corridor without:

"Open up in there; open up!"

Annister, a pulse in his temple beating to his hard-held breath, jerked back the door, to face—

Bristow, behind him three men whom he recognized as hangers-on at the hotel bar. They had something of the look of long-riders, villainous, hard-bitten; as one man, they grinned now, but without mirth, as the sheriff spoke:

"Annister—I arrest you for the murder of Tucson Charlie Westervelt and Bartley Pattison. In th' name of th' Law!"

Annister knew that if he resisted they would shoot him down; in fact, he knew, too, that was what they wanted; it would be the easiest way. Under the menace of the guns, he spread his hands, palms downward, preceding the four men down the stairs outward to the jail.

But as the heavy door clanged shut behind him, Annister, his gaze in a sightless staring into the north, groaned, in bitterness of spirit.

Mary was needing him; she was in peril, the greater because it was unknown—and—he would not be there.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE HOUSE OF FEAR

A HOUSE OF SILENCE, broken at times by a weird wailing as from the Pit; a house of dreams, gray in the moonlight, under the leprous-silvered finger of the moon, brooding now, a grim, gray fortress of the damned: the stronghold of the Beast.

Dense pines grew about it, so that when the wind wailed among them, like the wailing of a lost soul, it met and mingled with an eerie ululation rising as if muffled by many thicknesses of walls, to end, after a little, with a quick shriek and a sudden hush, with, after a moment, the faint echo of a taunting laugh.

That laugh would have struck terror to the swart soul of a lucivee, if lucivees have souls, for it was like an eldritch howling, faint and thin; like the thin, tinkling laughter of a fiend, without pity and without ruth.

Here, in the sanitarium of Doctor Elphinstone, there were secrets within secrets, walls within walls, downward, as in Dante's Seventh Hell, and from this monastery of the hopeless there penetrated, on occasion, outward from its battlemented walls, wild, frantic laughter, but there was nothing demoniac about it, because it was the laughter of the insane.

But that other laughter, like a sound heard in dreams—passers-by, if there were any such, hearing it, would shudder, and pass on. For the secret of that house of doom was a secret, terrible and grim; a secret, for him who might have guessed at it, to be whispered behind locked doors and with bated breath. And there had been those who had whispered of the lost souls within those walls, and the whisper ran that they were, indeed, madmen who had not been always mad, because—they had become such *after* their commitment to the bleak house within the wood.

These were but whispers, merely, for the power upon that house was not alone the power of Evil, rising like a dark tide among the pines; for in Dry Bone, and beyond it, in Palos Verde and Mojave, it was rumored that the strong arm of the Law upheld it, or such law, say, as might have issued from the devious hand of Hamilton Rook.

Once—and it was never repeated—a man had come there from the capital; he had demanded to see the doctor's patients; that had been a long time in the past.

And as the investigator had stood there, viewing with a faint, creeping horror the nondescripts paraded before him, gibbering, mouthing, in an inarticulate, furious babble, a man had burst suddenly from the line with a strangled cry:

"Jerry—don't you know me? I'm Humiston—Newbold. . ."

The voice had been the voice of Humiston, but the face—it had been the face of another, totally unlike; there had been no possible resemblance. But the man had been—*sane*. The investigator was persuaded of that; suffering under a peculiar delusion, indeed, but sane.

The man had rushed forward then, baring his arm; and there, on that thin, pitiful flesh that had once been healthy and hard, there ran a curious design in red; the investigator sucked in his breath as that tell-tale birth-mark sprang, livid, under his gaze. For he had seen it before.

The doctor's eyes had narrowed to slits; somehow, the man from the capital had gained the impression that it was the first time that he had seen that mark. But the investigator could do nothing. Birth-marks can be duplicated. He had waited then, in a curious indecision as the bearded doctor had interposed a suave:

"Well, of course, Commissioner, you're quite aware, or you should be, how it is: these paranoiacs are noted for their delusions—ah—megalocephalic tendencies, I should say . . . They believe themselves to be—someone else, and always a bank president, say, a famous actor, an author, a great general . . . Now—Mr. Humiston—you knew him, I believe?" Beneath the silken tone there ran suddenly a hint of iron, of menace, veiled but actual; the investigator felt it. "This patient knew your name, of course," the suave voice had continued. "Poor fellow—we must be gentle with him."

And there the matter had ended. Curiously enough, the man who had claimed to be Banker Humiston had, after that first burst of frenzied speech, kept silent. Perhaps that mordant gleaming in the doctor's eyes had telegraphed a warning, a message, a command.

But the investigator went home, oddly shaken, to dream, like Pilate's wife, of a white face with staring eyes which changed, even as he gazed, into the face of his friend, Newbold Humiston; to hear, even in his dream, a voice, and it was the voice of the living, and of the dead.

IN A BARE CELL, six feet by six—a cubicle in which there was barely sufficient head room for a tall man to stand upright—a figure stood with its hands clenched upon the bars, staring outward at the grim wood visible to the south.

Travis Annister had abode here in this living tomb three weeks now, three centuries, in which, as in a nightmare of cold horror, he had been aware merely of a face, three-pointed, bearded, the eyes active with a malign intelligence, the lips smiling always with the cold smile of death.

Twice a day the small panel in his cell door had slid backward without sound, to frame, in the opening, the face of Dr. Elphinstone, like a face without a body, and without a soul.

The father of Black Steve Annister knew that it was not a dream that would

pass, because, on the second day, the head had spoken. Travis Annister was scarcely a coward; he had fought like a baited grizzly when surprised in his Summer camp by the men who had brought him, under cover of the night, to this prison-house beyond the pale.

Now, at the voice, like the slow drip of an acid, Annister stared straight before him, with the gaze of a man who has abandoned hope:

"My dear Mr. Annister," the voice had whispered, "the little matter of that check, if you please. . . You will make it out to 'Cash'. . . Ah, that is good; I perceive you are—wise."

It had not been the pistol in the lean, clawlike hand; nor the eyes, even, brooding upon him with the impersonal, cold staring of a cobra; Travis Annister might have refused if it had not been for those sounds that he had heard, the sights that he had seen when, taken at midnight from his cubicle, he had beheld the administration of the Cone.

And, like Macbeth, with that one sight, and the sight of that which came after, he had "supped full of horrors," until now, at the bidding of that toneless voice, he had obeyed. Three times thereafter, at the command of his dark jailer, he had paid tribute, nor had he been, of all that lost battalion, the single victim; there had been others..

Now, separated from him scarce a dozen feet, a girl with golden hair sat, huddled, eyes in a sightless staring upon the stone floor of her cell. Cleo Ridgley had not been killed; she had been saved for a fate—beside which death would be a little thing—a fate unspeakable, even as had—Number Thirty-three.

Mary Allerton, removed from the others by a narrow corridor running crosswise in the cell-block, watched and waited now for the signal of the man to whom she had dispatched that message, it seemed, a century in the past.

That morning they had found the rope; they had removed it without comment, while the ophidian gaze of the dark Doctor had been bent upon her with what she fancied had been a queer, speculative look: a look of anticipation, and of something more. So far she had been treated decently enough; her cell was wide and airy, plainly but comfortably furnished; but as to that look in the gray-green eyes of the Master of Black Magic—she was not so sure.

There came a sudden movement in the corridor without; a panting, a snuffling, and the quick *pad-pad* of marching feet. Mary, her eye to the keyhole of that door, could see but dimly; she made out merely the sheeted figures, like grim, gliding ghosts; the figure, rigid, on the stretcher, moving, silent, on its rubber-tired wheels. Then, at an odor stealing inward through the key-hole, she recoiled.

That perfume had been sickish-sweet, overpowering, dense and yet sharp with a faint, acrid sweetness; the odor of ether. And then, although she could not see it, a man in the next cell had risen, white-faced, from his cot, to sink back limply as the dark hand, holding that inverted cone, had swept downward to his face.

A choked gurgle, a strangled, sharp cry, penetrating outward in a vague shadow of clamor—and then silence, with the faint whisper of the wind among the pines, the brool of the rushing river, the faint, half-audible footfalls passing and repassing in that corridor of the dead.

TRAVIS ANNISTER sprang to his feet as the narrow door swung open to press backward against the window-bars as the High-Priest of Horror, followed by his familiars, cowled and hooded, entered with a slow, silent step. The Doctor spoke, and his voice was like a chill wind:

"My friend, I bring you—forgetfulness . . . A brief Lethe of hours . . . And then—ah, then, you will be a *new* man, a man re-born, my friend . . . Now . . ."

Annister, his face gray with a sort of hideous strain, stared silent, white-lipped, as, at a low-voiced order, the attendants came forward.

The lean hand reached forward; it poised, darted, swooped; and in it was the Cone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CASTLE DANGEROUS

ALONE IN HIS CELL beneath the court-house, Black Steve Annister sat in silence, gazing northward through the barred window to where, invisible in the thick darkness just across the street, the road ran, straight as an arrow from the bow, to that dark forest brooding in a changeless silence where lay the House of Fear.

Childers would have had his wire long since; but by the time that help could come it would be—too late. Annister, fatalistic after a fashion, felt this to be the fact even as he hoped against hope.

But they were many, and he was but one. Tomorrow—it would be too late.

Head bowed in his hands, oblivious, at first he had heard it as a thin whisper, like a knife blade against the silence; it penetrated inward now, with the dull rasp of metal upon metal from without:

Sit tight, old-timer; I'm comin' through!"

There came a muffled thud, a twist; Annister, reaching forth a hand, found it clasped in thick groping fingers. Then, as he thrust head and shoulders through the sundered bars, a Shadow uprose, gigantic, against the stars; the voice came again, in a quick, rumbling whisper:

"It's me, old-timer—*Bull.*"

Annister, crawling through the opening, alighted upon soft turf. He heard Ellison's low chuckle as, following the giant, he passed along the lee of the building to where, showing merely as a black blot against the night, there stood an automobile, its engine just turning over, with the low, even purr of harnessed power; at twenty paces it was scarcely audible above the rising of the wind.

"Tank's full," said Ellison. "Now—"

He turned abruptly as a dim figure rose upward just beyond. For a moment Annister set himself for the onslaught; then his hand went out; it gripped the hard hand of Del Kane.

"Ellison done told me, Mr. Annister," he said. "An' so I come a-fannin' an' a-foggin' thisaway from Mojave; certain-sure I don't aim to leave no friend of mine hog-tied in no calaboose!"

Annister, his heart warming to these friends, debated with himself; then turned to Ellison with a sudden movement.

"Bull," he said. "I'm putting my cards on the table with you and Del, here."

He told them briefly of the message from Mary, the need of haste; then, of his mission, and of the help that was even now due, or would be, with the morning. If they were coming with him, northward along that road of peril, word must be left behind.

Kane thought a moment; then, wheeling swiftly, with muttered word, he disappeared in the darkness, to return presently with the good news that he had fixed it with the station-agent. The latter had just come on; he was a friend of Kane's, and no friend of Rook and Company; he would see to it, Kane said, that the reinforcements would be warned.

Boarding the car, they swung out cautiously along the silent street, under the pale stars, northward along that shadowy road. Presently there would be a moon, but just now they went onward in a thick darkness, with, just ahead, the dim loom of the road, flowing backward under the wheels, which presently ran like a ribbon of pale flame under the bright beam of the lights.

A half mile from the town, and Bull, who was driving, opened up, and the car leaped forward with the rising drone of the powerful motor, thirty, forty, fifty miles an hour; the wind of their passage drove backward like a wall as the giant's voice came now in a rumbling laugh:

"Some little speed-wagon, Mr. Annister, ha?" he said. "An' that's whatever! It ought to be. The man who owns it—who *did* own it half an hour ago—he's some particular, I'll say! Because—it's Mister Hamilton Rook's!"

Annister laughed grimly in answer, speaking a low word of caution as, after perhaps a half hour of their racing onrush the lights glimmered on dark trees to right and left.

"Somewhere about here, I think," he said, low. "Three outside guards, I understand. We'd better stop a little way this side, Bull . . . that's it. Now, look!"

As the big car slid slowly to a halt, the moon, rising above the trees, showed them, perhaps a hundred yards just ahead, a low, rambling, stone house, its windows like blind eyes to the night. Upon its roof the moonlight lay like snow, and even at that distance it was sinister, forbidding, as if the evil that was within had seeped through those stones, outward, in a creeping tide.

"Looks like a morgue," offered Ellison, with a shrug of his great shoulders, as the three, alighting, pushed the car before them into the wood.

Then, guns out, they went forward slowly among the trees.

Annister had formed no definite plan of attack. The red ribbon at that window-bar might or might not be visible under the moon, but, the guards eliminated, it seemed to him that, after all, they would have to make it an assault in force. Pondering this matter, of a sudden he leaped sidewise as a dim figure rose upward almost in his face.

Spread-eagled like a bat against the dimness, the figure bulked, huge, against the moon as Annister, bending to one side, brought up his fist in a lifting punch, from his shoe-tops.

It was a savage blow; it landed with the sound of a butcher's cleaver on the chopping-block; there came a gasping grunt; the thud of a heavy body, as the guard went downward without a sound.

"One!" breathed Ellison, as, trussing their victim with a length of stout line brought from the car, they left him, going forward carefully, keeping together, circling the house.

But it was not until they were half way round it, with, so far, no sign of that signal for which he looked, that they encountered the second guard.

He came upon them with a swift, silent onrush, leaping among the trees, a great, dun shape, spectral under the moon, fangs bared, as, without a sound, the hound drove straight for the giant's throat.

A shot would bring discovery; they dared not risk it. Annister could see the great head, the wide ruff at the neck, the grinning jaws . . . Then, the giant's hands had gone up and out; there came a straining heave, a wrench, a queer, whistling croak; Ellison, rising from his knees, looked downward a moment to where the beast, its jaw broken by that mighty strength, lay stretched, lifeless, at his feet.

By now they had come full circle, when, all at once, Annister, peering under his hand, sucked in his breath with a whispered oath.

Fair against the bars of a window, low down at their right, there was a dark smudge; the ribbon, black under the moon. Annister's heart leaped up in answer, as, with a quick word, he halted his companions in the shadow of a tree. A moment they conferred; then Ellison and Annister could almost see his grin in the darkness spoke beneath his hand:

"Why, that'll be easy! I've got m' tools; they're right here in my pocket, Mr. Annister! Those bars ought to be easy! For a fair journeyman sledge-swinger, it'll be easy an' you can lay to that!"

"Good!" whispered Annister in answer. "But—hurry!"

The moonlight lay in a molten flood between them and the house. But it was no time now for deliberation. Crossing that bright strip at a crouching run, the three were at the window; Annister's harsh whisper hissed in the silence, through those iron bars:

"*Mary!*"

For a heart-beat silence answered him; then, faint and thin, in a faint, tremulous, sobbing breath, there came the answer:

"Steve—thank God!"

Annister had spoken the girl's name without thought. At that high moment forms had been futile; that whisper had been wrung from him, deep-down, as had her answer. And then the soft rasp of steel on steel told that Ellison was at work.

But the giant was working against time. At any moment now might come the alarm; they had no means of knowing the number of those within those walls; perhaps even now peril, just behind, might be stalking them, out of the dark.

And still that soft rasp went on, until, at a low word from the girl, the giant, laying down his file, bent, heaved, putting his shoulder into it; and the bars sprang outward, bent and twisted in that iron grasp.

Annister, his hand reaching for the hand of the girl, went inward silently, to stand a moment, without speech, in the thick darkness of the little cell. But it was no time for dalliance.

Kane and Ellison behind him now, he set his shoulder against the door, as, Ellison aiding, it splintered outward with a soft, carrying crash. Ahead of them, along a dark, narrow corridor, there had come on a sudden a sound of voices, murmurs; Annister, going toward that sound, saw suddenly an open door; light streamed from it as the murmur of voices rose:

"My friend, I bring you—forgetfulness . . ."

The words came in a sort of hissing sibilance as Annister, reaching that doorway, halted a moment as the tableau was burned into his brain:

He saw his father, helpless, his face gray with the hideous terror of that which was upon him, in the grasp of two cloaked and hooded figures, their dark faces grinning with a bestial mirth.

And before him, hand upraised and holding a curious, funnel-shaped object at which the man in the corner shrank backward even as he looked, he saw a tall man with a black, forking beard—the same that he had seen that evening at the corner of the street; the same that he had seen in that dim backwater of Rangoon, the Unspeakable—the man with the dark, foreign visage, and the eyes of death.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE JAILER OF SOULS

ANNISTER'S GUN went up and out as the black-bearded man, turning, saw him where he stood.

Travis Annister, parchment-pale, took two forward, lurching steps, as the doctor, backing stiffly against the wall, hands upraised, called something in a high sing-song, savage, inarticulate.

Then—everything seemed to happen at once. A snarling, animal outcry echoed from the passage just without; it rose, as there came a far, gobbling mutter of voices, and the *pad-pad* of running feet.

The hooded Familiars, as one man, turned, and the long knives flashed, luminous, under the lights, as Kane and Ellison, meeting them half way, raised their heavy guns.

Annister, covering the Doctor, froze suddenly in motion as that gobbling horror mounted, and then, filling that narrow way like figures in a dream, they came: the outcasts, the lost battalion, the Men Who Had no Right to Live.

In their van, but running rather as if pursued than as if in answer to that snarling call, there came three men, guards by their dress, their faces contorted, agonized, upon them the impress of a crawling fear. They streamed past that door, pursuers and pursued, as Black Steve Annister, finger upon the trigger of his pistol, saw that lean hand sweep upward; it flicked the thin lips; the dark face grayed, went blank; the Dark Doctor, his gaze in a queer, frozen look upon Eternity, pitched forward upon his face.

In some way, as Annister could understand, the madmen had won free, but—how?

Turning, he saw a white face at his elbow as there sounded from without the staccato explosions of a motor, and a swift, hammering thunder upon the great door.

"I am—Newbold Humiston," said the face, "and I am not mad, or, rather, I am but mad north-north-west when the wind is southerly," he quoted, with a ghastly smile. "This devil—" he pointed to the body of Elphinstone—"has gone to his own place, but the evil that he did lives after him—in *us*."

His voice rose to a shriek as there came a rush of feet along the corridor: a compact body of men, at their head a tall man at sight of whom Stephen Annister flung up a hand.

"Well, Childers," he said. "I'm glad!"

Childers spoke pantingly, in quick gasps:

"We just made it, old man," he said. "A day ahead at that. The station agent put us on the track. We got 'em all—Lunn, and the rest; all but Rook—"

He paused, at Annister's inquiring look, turning his thumb down with an expressive gesture.

"We found him—strangled—in his office . . . a queer business . . ."

Annister gave an exclamation.

"The Indian!" he said. "Well, Rook was the 'Third Light,' sure enough!"

Again he was seeing the lean, avid face in the vestible of the smoker, the lighted match; himself, and the conductor, and Rook, the lawyer's pale eyes brooding above the glowing end of his cigarette . . . And again, as the picture passed, he was aware of the white face at his elbow as Mary Allerton, her hand in his, behind her the golden hair and the wide eyes of Cleo Ridgley, turned to Childers with a smile that yet had in it a hint of tears.

He that had been Newbold Humiston continued:

"The others—they're quiet now. The guards have gone—to follow *him*—the others saw to that."

He gestured toward the silent figue on the floor.

"His plan was worthy of his master, the Devil, because it was diabolically simple: Rook was his procurer and his clearing-house; you see, Rook found the victims, and cashed the checks that Elphinstone wrung from them; and then, when they had cleaned up, or when they deemed the time was ripe, the victims—disappeared. Rook's secretary they kidnapped for revenge; Miss Allerton because she knew much; they suspected that she was in the Secret Service. And so—these others disappeared."

He laughed; the laugh of a dead man risen from the tomb.

"They disappeared—yes—but—they remained, as you see—myself—a living ghost!"

"But how?" asked the younger Annister, in the sudden quiet, the realization of what his father and Mary had escaped burning like a a quick fire in his veins. The toneless voice went on:

"Elphinstone was a surgeon, a master . . . You've heard of Dermatology? Well, it's been done in India, I believe; practiced there to an extent unknown here, of course. An anesthetic, and then an operation: new faces for old; forged faces; the thing was diabolically simple. And so when they, the victims, saw themselves in a mirror, sometimes they went mad, for who could prove it? Who would be believed?"

His voice rose, died, gathered strength, as a candle flames at the last with a brief spark of life:

"It's done," he muttered. "He's gone—but his work lives after him, even as he called himself—the Jailer of Souls!"

THE END.

Editor Baffled by Weird Seance

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S lecture tours in the United States have created wide discussion and considerable difference of opinion, some persons contending that he is really in communication with the spirit world, while others declare that he is the victim of tricksters. In order to conduct an impartial investigation, J. Malcolm Bird, associate editor of The Scientific American, attended several of Sir Arthur's seances, and afterward declared that he had observed psychic phenomena that could hardly be explained by any known natural cause. He could discover no physical connection between the medium or the spectators and the phenomena, and he saw mysterious self-luminous lights, attributed by Sir Arthur to ectoplasm, and heard strange noises that defied his efforts to establish a natural cause.

"My best judgment would be that both in direction and subject matter much of the 'communicated' material of the seance would be quite beyond the normal ability of the medium," he said. "The seance entered a phase which seems to me to prove, without question, that telepathy or some other force with intelligence behind it was at work.

"The trumpet began to talk, loudly and distinctly and coherently, in a voice that had not yet been heard . . . It was not ordinary ventriloquism, because the ventriloquist cannot work in the dark. He doesn't deceive your ears, but rather your eyes, by directing your attention to the point whence he wishes you to infer that the sound came. The voice really came from the center of the circle."

JACK O' MYSTERY

A Modern Ghost Story

By EDWIN MacLAREN

THE LIMOUSINE came to a glistening stop before an office building in Monroe Street, and a handsome woman of thirty, expensively and stylishly gowned, emerged from the car and entered the building, her mien bespeaking nervousness.

Furtively, as one who fears pursuit, she hastened across the marble rotunda, edged hurriedly into an elevator and ascended to the ninth floor, where she approached a door bearing upon its opaque glass panel the gilt lettering:

BARRY DETECTIVE AGENCY

She paused here for a moment, in an effort to recover her equanimity; and then, with a brave assumption of self-assurance, she opened the door and entered the room and closed the door behind her.

The room was quite deserted; but promptly from an adjoining chamber there came a lean-faced young man of inquiring blue eyes, who courteously greeted her.

"Is Mr. Barry in?" she asked. "Mr. Herbert Barry?"

"I am Herbert Barry," he said.

"Oh!" Surprised, she eyed the slim young man half incredulously. He seemed scarcely more than a boy. "Mrs. Franklin Parker told me about you—recommended you very highly. Perhaps that is why," she added, with a smile, "I expected to find an older man. . . . I suppose most of the people who come to see you are in trouble of some sort. *I* am not in trouble, exactly, but—" She glanced around the office. "May I have a word with you in privacy?"

He held open the door to the adjoining room. "Suppose we step in here? My stenographer is at lunch. There's no danger of our being disturbed."

Preceding him into the inner office, she bade him lock the door; and, thus assured of their safety from interruption, she sat nervously on the edge of a chair and faced him across the flat-top desk. There clung to her, somehow, a subtle suggestion of wealth and luxury, and her well-chiseled features denoted good breeding. Subtle, too, was the delicate odor of violets that fragrantly touched his nostrils as she leaned toward him across the desk. Then he noticed she wore a rich cluster of the flowers upon her mauve silk waist.

He observed, also, the purplish shadows beneath her large brown eyes, her half-frightened, half-worried demeanor and her air of suppressed excitement, as though she were struggling to control some inner perturbation.

"Perhaps I've made a mistake," she began, "in coming here. I don't know. But I've been so perplexed, so utterly mystified, by some strange things that have happened lately—Did you ever hear of Willard Clayberg?" she broke off suddenly to ask.

Barry knitted his brows. The name had a familiar sound.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I seem to remember him. Wasn't he the North Shore millionaire who went insane last winter and killed his wife and himself?"

She nodded. Her elbows were resting on the desk and her slender fingers, interlaced beneath her small white chin, were twitching.

"Exactly. They lived, as you probably recall, in a quaint old-fashioned home near Hubbard Woods—just the two of them; no children. Following the tragedy, the house was closed up and for a long while remained unoccupied. Despite the scarcity of dwelling places, nobody apparently cared to live there. For one thing, it is not a modern residence, and for another—and this really seemed the most serious objection—it it had acquired a reputation of being 'haunted.'

"Of course," she went on, with a nervous little laugh, "you will say—just as *I* said—that such a thing is perfectly absurd. You'd think that no normal person would take it seriously. And yet there were so many strange things told about the house—creepy stories of weird sounds in the dead of night and unearthly things seen through the windows—that people, ordinarily level-headed, began to shun the place.

"I have never believed in ghosts, Mr. Barry, and I've always ridiculed people who did; but now—Do you know my husband, Scott Peyton?"

"I've heard of him," said Barry. "Architect, isn't he?"

"A very successful one. He has designed some of the finest buildings in Chicago. But he's the most superstitious man alive! He's a Southerner, born in Georgia, and at childhood his negro 'mammy' filled his mind with all manner of silly superstitions, including a deathly fear of 'ha'nts.' He has never been able to overcome this, although both of us have tried.

"About three weeks ago," Mrs. Peyton continued, her voice betraying her agitation, "he and I were motoring along the North Shore when we espied this old Clayberg estate. The quaint charm of the old-fashioned place at once enchanted me; and when we alighted and strolled through the grounds my enchantment grew. It seemed as if Nature had outdone herself in lavishing picturesque beauty there. Mr. Peyton was as fascinated as I.

"We were planning, at that time, to give up our town apartment and buy a suburban home; and this seemed to be just the thing we were looking for. We inquired of the neighbors concerning it, and it was then we discovered its tragic history. When my husband was told of the hideous thing that had happened there last winter, and of its evil reputation since, his enthusiasm vanished, and I immediately saw he would never consider buying it.

"But I had set my heart on having that place; and later—after I had pleaded and argued with him in vain—I decided to buy it myself and, by compelling him to live there, perhaps cure him permanently of his superstitious fear. I saw the agent next day, learned the old home could be bought at a bargain, and had my father buy it and deed it to me.

"My husband was furious when I told him what I had done. He declared he would never enter the house and urged me to sell it forthwith. But I was as firm as he; and finally, after a rather violent argument and by taunting him with being a coward, I contrived to get his reluctant consent to make our home in the 'haunted house'."

"WE MOVED in last Thursday," said Mrs. Peyton sitting nearer the desk and lowering her voice, "and on Thursday night, and every night since then—" She exhaled audibly, her lip quivering.

"What happened?" asked Barry.

"It's been a nightmare!" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "Ever since that first night the most peculiar things have happened. I don't know what to make of it, or what to think, or do. It's baffling! I'm not in the least superstitious; and yet—"

"Start at the beginning," suggested Barry, "and tell me exactly what happened."

"Well, the first night we slept in the master's bedroom—a large front room on the second floor—and about midnight I was awakened by my husband, who was sitting up in bed, gasping and trembling with terror. Before I could speak, he sprang from bed and switched on the light and began frantically searching the room, looking into the closets and under the bed and peering into the hall.

"'For heaven's sake!' I cried. 'What's the matter?'

"He pointed to the corridor door. His hand was trembling and his face was as white as paper. For a moment he seemed unable to speak.

"'It came right through that door!' he said at last. 'I woke up just as it came in the room—a ghastly-looking old man with white hair and a long beard. It didn't open the door, but came right *through* it!'

"'Nonsense!' I laughed. 'You've been thinking about ghosts until you imagine you're seeing them. Now come back to bed and go to sleep.'

"But he indignantly insisted he had actually seen the thing.

"'I saw it cross the room,' he declared, 'and stop at the bed and stand there looking down at me. When I sat up it disappeared—vanished into air.'

"I couldn't believe such a preposterous thing, of course, but, to humor him, I offered to get up and help him search the house.

"'What good would that do?' he objected. 'I tell you the thing was a *spirit!*'

"Finally he went back to bed. But he slept no more that night. At breakfast next morning I could see he hadn't closed his eyes.

"On the following night I again was awakened by my husband, who seemed even more frightened than before.

"'It came back again!' he whispered hoarsely. 'It was puttering around your desk over there.'

"Then he jumped out of bed and ran to the desk and lit the lamp there. A moment later he uttered a sharp cry and came hurrying back to my bed, with a sheet of writing paper in his hand.

"'Look at that!' he exclaimed, and thrust the paper before my eyes.

"I saw written on the paper, in a sprawling hand, the words, *'Leave this House!'* and I knew then that somebody had been in the room.

"I got up and tried the door. It was still locked and the key was in the hole, just as I had left it. The windows hadn't been touched, apparently. How, then, had the person entered our room?

"My husband, of course, insisted it was not a living being, but a ghost, who could pass through a locked door as though it didn't exist. And, as before, he refused to look for it.

"Next day, however, with our cook and houseman, I thoroughly searched the house from top to bottom—and found nothing. No trace of anybody having entered the house. Nothing wrong anywhere.

"On Saturday night I was awakened again—this time by a frantic knocking on our bedroom door. I sat up, startled. My husband was sleeping soundly, exhausted after two sleepless nights.

"I slipped quietly from bed, without disturbing him, and tiptoed to the door and whispered through the panel:

" 'Who's there?'

"The cook's voice answered, and I could tell by her tone she was terribly frightened:

" 'It's me, ma'am. I'm leavin' this house tonight. I won't stay here another minute!'

"I opened the door and stepped out in the hall—taking care not to awake Mr. Peyton—and found Clara fully dressed and holding her traveling-bag. It was evident she had dressed in considerable haste, and it was equally plain that she was almost paralyzed with fear.

" 'I just seen a spook!' she gasped. 'An old man with white hair and whiskers. He come right in my room while I was asleep. I woke up and seen 'im. And he writ somethin' on my dresser. You c'n see for yerself, ma'am, what he writ there.'

"FEARFUL of awakening my husband, I had drawn her away from the bedroom door; and now, with some difficulty, I persuaded her to follow me to her room, where I found, written in white chalk across the bureau mirror, the command: *'Leave here at once!'*

"Clara was determined to obey this 'message from the dead' by leaving instantly. I couldn't induce her even to stay until morning. Despite my protests and entreaties, she fled from the house and passed the remainder of the night, as I later discovered, in the Hubbard Woods railroad station, taking an early train for Chicago.

"I tried to keep the occurrence from my husband, inventing an excuse for Clara's hasty departure, but he wormed the truth from me, and of course that further harassed his already overwrought nerves. Also, it gave him the right to say, 'I told you so!'

"He renewed his pleading to abandon the house; but I still refused to give it up—still refused to admit that it was 'haunted,' or that there was anything supernatural in what he and Clara had seen.

"It didn't end there, unhappily. On the very next night—that was night before last—the houseman was visited by the mysterious 'thing.' He said he saw it in his room, after midnight, stooping over his table, that he shouted at it and it disappeared. Then, so he told us, he got up and struck a light and discovered the 'ghost' had been trying to send a message to him by arranging some matches on the table.

"He showed us these matches, saying he had left them just as they were found. They were so placed as to spell the word, *'LEAVE,'* in capital letters. Evidently the 'ghost' was frightened away before he could finish his sentence. Needless to say, the houseman left us.

"Well, in spite of all these things, I simply couldn't bring myself to believe that the mysterious visitations were supernatural. I was sure there must be some logical explanation. But *last* night—!"

"What happened last night?" asked Barry, as Mrs. Peyton paused.

Mrs. Peyton, still sitting forward in her chair, was searching in her reticule. Barry noticed her fingers were unsteady and that her underlip was caught between her teeth to still its quivering.

"Last night," she went on, with a transparent effort at lightness, "*I* saw the 'ghost'! Please don't smile! I was quite wide awake when I saw it—as wide awake as I am this moment—and in full possession of all my wits. And I can't understand yet how it got in my room, or how it got out, or even what it was.

"I was alone in the house, too," she continued, taking a photograph from the reticule and placing it, face down, on the desk. "Yesterday afternoon Mr. Peyton telephoned from his office that he must stay downtown rather late to attend a meeting of building contractors and suggested that I come in to the city for dinner, and bring a friend and 'take in a show,' and meet him afterward. But I wasn't in the mood and told him I'd prefer to stay at home.

" 'But I won't be home before twelve o'clock,' he said, 'and I don't like the idea of your being all alone in that house at night, without even a servant on the place.'

"I reminded him that the chauffeur and gardener were still with us (they sleep in the garage and hadn't been alarmed by the 'spook'), and with these two and Mitch, our Scotch collie, to guard me I felt perfectly safe. As for the 'ghost,' I laughingly told him, I really would enjoy meeting it and having a chat on its astral adventures.

"He declined to unbend from his seriousness and became irritated when I refused to leave the house. We had quite a tiff, but I finally had my way, and the best he could get was a promise from me to lock myself in before going to bed. He said he would sleep in one of the guest chambers.

"After a pick-up meal in the kitchen, I went upstairs to our room and wrote letters until ten o'clock. Then I prepared for bed.

"For a moment I regretted not having done as my husband asked. The house *did* seem eerie; no denying that—big and dark and silent, and not a living creature in it except myself.

"But I quickly shook off this feeling, assuring myself there was no such thing as a ghost, and, even if there was, that it couldn't possibly harm me. However, remembering my promise, I locked the door and put the key under my pillow, and bolted all the windows, and, as an additional precaution, I looked under the bed and inspected both closets. And I knew *absolutely*, when I put out the light and got into bed, that I was the only person in that room.

"I was soon asleep," said Mrs. Peyton, again feeling in her handbag, "and it seemed only a few minutes later—though I know now it was several hours—when I found myself wide awake. I suppose it was the lack of fresh air that awoke me. I'm accustomed to sleeping with the windows open.

"I was on the point of getting up to open a window when, all at once, my blood seemed to freeze. I discovered, quite suddenly, *I was not alone in the room!*"

MRS. PEYTON paused and drew from the handbag a sheet of blue linen notepaper. Nervously creasing the paper in her slender white fingers, she continued, with heightening agitation, her large brown eyes earnestly watching the detective's face: "I won't deny, Mr. Berry, that I was frightened. In fact, I confess that I was so terrified I seemed utterly powerless to move or speak. I had always supposed if I ever *should* see a ghost I would feel no fear

whatever. But now that I found myself actually looking at one—or at least looking at what, in that frightful moment, I potently *believed* to be one—I was petrified with terror.

"It was sitting at my desk, right where I'd been sitting all evening, and its back was toward me. The moon had risen and was shining through the windows, brightening the room with a pale half-light.

"The figure at the desk appeared to be writing. In fact, I could hear the scratching of the pen. I could also hear the ticking of a small clock on the desk. That's how still everything was.

"Well, it sat there writing—a blurred, shapeless object in the silvery moonlight—for I don't know how long. It seemed an age! And all the time I was conscious—terrifyingly so—that I was alone in that great house with it!"

Mrs. Peyton paused and took the photograph from the desk.

"Instinctively, I tried to scream," she went on, "but my throat was parched and I seemed unable to utter a sound. However, I must have made some sort of noise, for the thing suddenly turned and looked at me over its shoulder. And for the first time, I saw its face."

"What was the face like?" asked Barry.

She handed him the photograph.

"That's a picture of it," she said.

It was a kodak "snapshot" of an aged man with flowing white hair and a patriarchal beard. Turning it over, Barry saw written on the back, "Willard Clayberg, December, 1922."

"It's Mr. Clayberg's last picture," said Mrs. Peyton. "I obtained it this morning from one of his grandsons. It was taken last winter, shortly before the dreadful tragedy at our house."

"Getting back to last night?" reminded Barry.

"Oh, yes! Well, the thing sat there, quite silent and motionless, staring at me through the moonlight. Its face was the same as the one in that picture, only, somehow, it didn't seem *real*. It was peculiarly pallid and lifeless—like the face of a dead person.

"Finally I found my voice and cried out: 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

"Instantly the thing rose from the desk, without making a particle of sound, and glided swiftly and silently across the room—and disappeared!

"That seemed to revive my courage—the thought that I had frightened it away—and I sprang from bed and ran to the door.

"The door was still locked! I tried the windows. They were still bolted. Neither the door nor the windows had been touched. Everything in the room, in fact, was just as I had left it upon going to bed.

"Then I crossed to my desk and lit the lamp there and found—this!" Mrs. Peyton offered the sheet of note paper, which she had been nervously fingering.

Barry unfolded it and read the words scrawled upon its blue surface:

"Again I warn you to leave this house. This is the last—"

"When I interrupted him," explained Mrs. Peyton, "he apparently had just written the word, 'last.'"

Barry nodded and narrowly examined the handwriting. It was old-style script, angular and shaky, indicative of a very aged and infirm person.

"Have you the notes received by Mr. Peyton and the cook?"

"No; but I saw them. Both were written in the same hand as that," indicating the sheet of blue paper.

Barry again looked at the photograph, holding it to the light and inspecting it closely. Suddenly he asked:

"What sort of clothing did your visitor wear?"

"Why, as I remember, he wore a sort of long gray robe and a queer little cap—a skullcap, maybe. But it was all very blurred and indistinct. He seemed to be enveloped in a kind of gray mist. With his white hair and beard, the effect was quite 'creepy.'"

"Anything else happen last night?"

"Nothing—except that I passed the rest of the night trying to solve the riddle. The first thing I did, after finding the note, was to try the door and windows again—and I again made sure they hadn't been touched. I knew positively that nobody could get in the room *except* through the door or windows, so *how* had the old man entered?

"I was still hunting an answer to that question, and growing more perplexed than ever, when I heard a heavy footfall on the front porch; then the front door opened and closed with a *bang*, and my husband came bounding noisily upstairs. I knew from this he had seen the light at my window, even before he called to me reprovingly through the bedroom door: 'Haven't you turned in yet? It's 'way after one o'clock.'

"It was then I decided to say nothing to him about what happened. And I haven't.

"But this morning, as soon as he'd left for the office, I called on Mrs. Parker and told her everything. She suggested that I see you. I hesitated at first to do this, because only yesterday I spoke to Mr. Peyton about calling in the police or employing a detective to investigate the mystery, and he vigorously objected. He really believed the thing was supernatural and declared that no living person could overcome it. The only thing to do, he said, was to leave the house as the 'spirit' commanded.

"I finally decided, however, to follow Mrs. Parker's suggestion, particularly as she recommended you so highly—and so, quite unknown to my husband, here I am!

"And now, Mr. Barry," said Mrs. Peyton, sitting back in her chair for the first time and moving her white hands in a pretty gesture of relief, "what do *you* make of it all?"

BARRY, examining the feeble handwriting beneath a reading-glass, discerned what appeared to be a startling solution of the mystery; but, deeming it best for the moment to say nothing of this, he offered an obvious answer to her question:

"From what you have told me, Mrs. Peyton, it would seem that an unknown person, concealed in your house, is bent on frightening you away."

"But I've thoroughly searched the house," she protested, "not once, but several times; and I know positively that nobody is hidden there—and that nobody has broken in. Besides, even if the old man *was* in the house, or *had* broken in, how did he enter my room last night?"

"Perhaps, after I've inspected the room—"

"Can you do it, without Mr. Peyton knowing?"

"Quite easily, I think, with our help. Since you are in need of servants, my presence can readily be explained—"

"Why, of course!" she eagerly interrupted. "Our new houseman! It will seem quite plausible, too," she added, rising and glancing at her watch, "particularly since I've just engaged a new cook—who is waiting for me now, by the way, in my car. We had best start at once, Mr. Barry. It's nearly one, and my husband is usually home before six."

. . . . A little later, as the Peyton limousine smartly threaded its way through the downtown streets, Barry, sitting on the front seat beside the chauffeur, planned a procedure that would either substantiate, or explode, his tentative explanation of the white-bearded "ghost."

His first step was taken immediately: At a State Street department store he secretly bought a pad of cheap writing paper, a package of ungummed envelopes, ten two-cent stamps, a thick lead

pencil, a jar of mucilage and an oblong carton of sterilized gauze.

Later still, upon reaching the "haunted house," he saw no cause to revise his plan, and no reason to doubt that the solution he already had formed, although amazing, was essentially correct.

With the new cook installed in the kitchen, Mrs. Peyton conducted him to the second-floor front bedroom—a commodious south chamber—where she had seen the "ghost" last night. Barry looked at the small mahogany desk, surveyed the white-enameled twin beds, measured their distance from the corridor door and carefully examined the lock thereon.

Then, swiftly though systematically, he searched the rest of the house and afterward strolled outdoors. Sauntering across the velvety lawns, beneath the aged trees, he casually approached the garage some two hundred feet from the house. He had found nothing in the house, and now saw nothing in the surrounding grounds, to suggest the weird things he had heard. Here, to all appearance, was only an old-fashioned suburban home dozing peacefully in the mellow sunshine of a midsummer afternoon.

At the garage, which aforetime had been a stable, he engaged in back-stairs gossip with Frank Dominick, the chauffeur—in the presence of the gardener, John Hart, an uncommunicative person—and learned that both were preparing to "give notice."

"We ain't actually *seen* old Clayberg's ghost—at least not *yet*," said Dominick, "but we've heard enough about 'im and I guess he'll be callin' on us next. I guess the only reason we ain't seen 'im before is because we sleep up there," pointing to the upper floor of the garage. "Take my advice, friend, and don't stay here over night. Am I right, John?"

John Hart, a senile man, shifted his cud of tobacco and expectorated lavishly, thus contributing a fresh stain to his ragged white beard.

"You're right," said he, and spoke no more.

Returning to the house, Barry was given a white jacket and a pair of blue trousers by Mrs. Peyton; and at six o'clock, wearing these garments and a servile mien, he was laying the dinner table when the master of the house arrived. Barry, with a plate and napkin in his hands, observed him through the doorway—a trim-looking man of thirty-five—and remarked the harrowing fear that sat upon his countenance.

His haggard eyes, like those of his wife, denoted loss of sleep; and he evinced no interest in her "luck in finding two perfect servants." In the same troubled preoccupation, he acknowledged the introduction of Barry, who was presented as Thomas Field. Clearly, he was too frightened and worried to be conscious of his environment.

Dinner over, Barry went to his room. It was a tiny chamber tucked under the eaves at the rear of the top floor, and it was here that his predecessor had beheld the "apparition" night before last. Upon the small table, where the word, "LEAVE" had been spelled with matches, Barry spread the articles which he had bought this afternoon.

Then he drew the table to the window, and lighted the lamp, and sat down and began writing letters to mythical persons in Iowa. His door stood open, and so did the window, and anybody passing in the hall, or standing north of the house, could have watched him at his employment.

For upward of two hours he sat steadily writing, his back to the door, his face silhouetted against the window; and when he had written five letters, and had stamped and directed them to his imaginary correspondents, he uncorked the mucilage pot and sealed the flaps of the envelops.

And then, somehow, he awkwardly upset the bottle of mucilage, and the stuff oozed stickily over his pencil and paper.

It was at this moment, or perhaps a little earlier, that he heard a slight rustle in the hall behind him, as of somebody moving away from his door, but, apparently intent only upon cleaning the mucilage from the table, he never looked round or gave any sign that he heard.

Presently he extinguished the light and, disrobing in the darkness, looked from his window. The old Clayberg stable, now Peyton's garage, loomed like a great dusky shadow in the starlit night; and at a small upper window, almost on a direct line with his, a yellow light glowed.

Feeling through the dark, Barry removed the sterilized gauze from the carton, snipped off a ten-inch length, and returned the gauze and box to his pocket. Then he stretched his length on the narrow iron bed, his face to the window, his door ajar.

Wide awake, he lay staring into the darkness, his mind alert, sharpened by expectancy.

THE MOON rose in the southeast, bathing the outdoors in a silvery sheen and mitigating, somewhat, the darkness of his room. The minutes lengthened into hours; and as the hours dragged slowly by Barry fought off the desire to sleep.

The fight became increasingly difficult; and finally—he judged it was long past midnight—it seemed as though he could no longer force himself to stay awake. His eyelids drooped. He dozed. . . .

And then, all at once, he was wide awake again, his pulse tingling. Somebody had entered his room and was standing now at the table, between the bed and window, so near that Barry could have touched him by reaching forth his hand.

Barry, however, remained motionless, simulating sleep; and beneath lowered lids he watched the intruder—a blurred gray figure—take up the pencil and start writing on the pad of paper. The moon had climbed to the zenith, and by its pale reflection Barry distinguished the salient marks of his visitor; the long gray robe, the flowing white hair and beard, the white skullcap.

Then the figure put down the pencil and vanished—gliding to the hall as swiftly and noiselessly, it seemed, as a shadow leaving the room.

Still Barry did not move. Silence ensued. Then, from some point down the hall, came a woman's piercing scream.

Barry rose, wrapped the lead pencil in the strip of gauze, and enclosed it in the cardboard box and replaced the box in his pocket.

Then, wearing coat and trousers, he stepped into the hall and lit a gas jet there—just as the new cook, screaming with terror, emerged from her room. Hysterical with fright, she frantically flourished a scrap of wrapping paper. And when she could speak coherently:

"I just seen a spook in my room—an old man wid white whiskers. I won't stay in this house! He writ somethin' here—"

She broke off to examine the bit of paper by the fluttering gas flame; and when she saw the words written on her paper she uttered another terrified shriek and, heedless of her scant attire, fled toward the front staircase. She was met at the head of the stairs by Mr. and Mrs. Peyton—he in pajamas and bathrobe, she in a peignoir, and both visibly alarmed—and to them she told, or tried to tell, the reason for her mad flight.

"Now lemme get outa here!" she ended, attempting to brush past them. "He told me to leave tonight—and *I'm goin'!*"

Barry, following sleepily in her wake, rubbing his eyes as one newly awakened from slumber, heard Peyton saying: "This is dreadful, dreadful!" and Mrs.

Peyton entreating the cook to "stay at least till morning."

Unable to persuade the cook to remain, Mrs. Peyton turned appealingly to Barry. "Did you see anything in your room, Field?"

"No, mem," said Barry, hiding a yawn. "I was fast asleep when she woke me up, mem."

This, however, exerted no influence on the cook. Like Clara who went before her, she departed immediately for the railroad station, there to pass the rest of the night.

Peace at last returned to the house—and Barry returned to his room, locked the door and observed on his pad the same angular scrawl, *"Leave this house tonight!"* which had frightened her away. Then he went to bed and slept soundly until after sunrise.

He was up and dressed at seven o'clock; and when the Peytons came downstairs about eight he had an appetizing breakfast awaiting them. As soon as her husband had left for his office, Mrs. Peyton, returning from the front door, looked at the detective with anxious inquiry in her large brown eyes.

"Have you discovered anything at all, Mr. Barry?"

Barry took a crumpled napkin from the breakfast table and folded it thoughtfully between his long fingers. He was thinking: "Yes, Mrs. Peyton; I've discovered the identity of your 'ghost,' and you alone have the power to 'kill' it." Aloud, however:

"I'll make a report today," he promised, and left the room with a stack of dishes and the folded napkin.

He deposited the dishes in the kitchen sink. The napkin went into his hip pocket. Then he started upstairs for his other clothes. At her bedroom door he paused, listening. The door stood open. Mrs. Peyton, downstairs, was sitting at the breakfast table, absently crumbling a bit of toast in her fingers, a faraway look in her eyes. Barry, at her bedroom door, was remarking the small mahogany desk, where, two nights ago, the "ghost" had written his warning to her.

In three swift strides he crossed to the desk, searched hurriedly among the papers there and neatly pocketed one of these. Then he continued to his room. Mrs. Peyton still sat at the breakfast table in a pensive reverie, her wistful brown gaze lost in the morning sunshine beyond the leaded casements.

AN HOUR later Barry alighted from a train in Chicago and forthwith called on a colleague, whose skill in analyzing handwriting and identifying finger prints had earned him the title of "expert." He spent considerable time with this man; and then he went to his office and wrote his report for Mrs. Peyton.

And when the report was finished he sat gazing at it musingly—somewhat as Mrs. Peyton had gazed from her breakfast-room window this morning.

With an energetic shrug, as if to shake off his odd mood, he sealed the report in an envelope, and put it in his pocket and started for an office building in lower Michigan Avenue.

Presently he entered a room in this building, luxuriously furnished and unoccupied, and abruptly halted. In the adjoining room he could hear the voices of Scott Peyton and his wife; and since the door between the two offices stood partly open, he could also see their faces. Himself unobserved, Barry stood silently watching and listening.

"I suppose you're right, Scott," she said, standing beside her husband's desk and looking down at him. "After what happened last night, I'm just about ready to do as you say—give the house up and move back to town. But I do so hate to leave that old place. I wish—"

"Why should you?" he interrupted, scowling at his desk and avoiding her eyes.

Mrs. Peyton looked down, biting a corner of her lip and twising the wedding ring of her finger.

"It's not so much what *I* want," she faltered, her voice tremulously low, "but—the city is no place—not the *best* place for our—*Oh, Scott!*" she cried passionately, and flung out her hands to him in appeal. "Can't you *see?*"

Scott Peyton looked up and met his wife's eyes; and the thing he saw in their liquid brown depths instantly chased the frown from his face and took him to his feet in a swift rush of remorse and gladness.

In the next instant she was sobbing in his arms; and he was tenderly patting her shoulders and saying soothingly:

"It's all right, honey. We won't give the place up. I don't think—the ghost—will bother us again. . . ."

At this juncture Barry quietly departed.

A LITTLE LATER he again sat at his desk, gazing again at the report he had written. And he now knew that this report would never be seen by any eye save his.

But while he is sitting here suppose we look over his shoulder and glance at the thing before he tears it up:

"In Re Peyton 'ghost': . . . . Using a King Lear costume, which he put on and off with lightning agility, the 'ghost' hoped, by his nocturnal prowling, to frighten Mrs. Peyton into abandoning the house as her husband desired. . . . Following his nightly appearances, he quickly removed and concealed his costume, and returned to his bed, careful to make no sound. He varied this procedure, however, night before last, when he visited Mrs. Peyton's room. Had she left her key in the lock that night, instead of hiding it under her pillow, he would have been unable to call upon her. As it was, he readily unlocked the door and entered. Leaving silently, he hid his costume, then left the house and returned, making considerable noise. . . . . The finger prints he left in glue last night and those he left on his napkin this morning, as well as his real and disguised handwriting positively identify the 'ghost' as Mrs. Peyton's husband, Scott Peyton."

Have You Been Reading About King Tut? If so, You'll be Interested in

OSIRIS

The Weird Tale of an Egyptian Mummy

By ADAM HULL SHIRK

THE recent and lamentable death of Sir Richard Parmenter, F. R. G. S., is too fresh in the public's mind to warrant further reference, and were it not that I feel myself capable of throwing light upon the incidents contributing to the sudden and apparently unnecessary snuffing out of a valuable life, I should refrain from again alluding to it.

It is well known that the physicians at the time decided that valvular weakness of the heart must have been responsible for the death of the noted Egyptologist, but the statement of his own doctor that Sir Richard had never theretofore exhibited indications of such weakness, and that he was, to all appearances, in the best of health just prior to his death, caused considerable wonder.

I had thought to let the facts remain buried, but, for certain reasons, I shall reconsider my determination and tell what I know.

I shall always remember the night on which Sir Richard summoned me, as his counselor, to attend him at his apartments in the Albermarle. It was a night of storm, and the London streets were a mass of slime and slush. A beastly wind had sprung up, and as I left my chambers at the Temple it almost took me off my feet. Therefore, it was with no little satisfaction that I found a cheery log fire awaiting me in the library of my distinguished client's home, and the nip of brandy he provided was a life saver.

I noted, however, that for all his assumption of cheerfulness, something was preying upon his mind, and I determined to get at the root of the matter without delay:

"How can I serve you, Sir Richard?" I asked, briskly. "I see there is something troubling you."

"Is it as apparent as that?" he asked, trying to appear unconcerned: but his strong, homely features belied his effort at calmness.

Before I could reply, he went on:

"But never mind that: I want you to write my will—now."

"Your will?" My expression of surprise and incredulity was natural, for since I had been retained by him I had marked it as one of his few idiosyncrasies that he had never made his will. When I had mentioned to him the advisability of doing so, he had put it by with a whimsical remark about being superstitious.

"Mandrake"

By
ADAM HULL SHIRK

Will appear in the July
WEIRD TALES

It's a Strange Yarn of Superstitious Fear

Don't Miss It!

"I am in earnest," he declared, "and it will be very simple—just a brief form, and I'll sign it with my man as witness."

"But why the haste?" I said. "Why not wait till I can have the document properly drawn up at my office tomorrow—"

"No; now!" he said, and there was such finality in his tone I had no choice.

My concern for my client, whom I really liked and respected immensely, prompted me to ask:

"You're not ill, Sir Richard?"

He shook his head, with the ghost of a smile on his rugged face.

"Physically—no. But—"

He paused, and after a moment he again urged me to proceed with the making of the will.

I drew up the document, which was a simple one, leaving the bulk of his large properties to his sister in Surrey, with numerous small bequests to friends and distant relatives, and a handsome sum and his private collection to the British Museum and the Imperial Museum of Egyptology. We had in his man, and the document was duly signed, after which he drew a long breath of relief and, with a return of something like his natural manner, passed me his cigar-case and leaned back in his chair, smoking comfortably.

"I've a story to tell you, Madden," he said between puffs, "and it's a queer yarn, too. You'll think—but never mind. Listen first, and say what you like afterward. Only—" he glanced about him with an apprehensive expression that fairly set my nerves atingle. "I hope we have time."

"Time for what?" I asked.

He relaxed again and smiled:

"It's all right," he declared. "I'm a bit nervous, I guess, but it's all right. Have another brandy."

We drank solemnly together. Then he settled back once more and I prepared to listen.

"Madden," said he, "perhaps you'll smile at what has seemed to me serious enough to warrant the steps I have just taken—making my will, I mean—but, however you look at it, I want you to know it's true—every word of it.

"My last trip to Egypt—from which I just returned a fortnight ago—was to have been my final one, anyway. I've made six trips out there in my life, and I've collected enough information to fill a dozen volumes. Also, I've contributed many fine specimens to the museum and corrected many misapprehensions concerning the interpretation of some of the

hieroglyphs. So, all in all, I think I've done pretty well.

"This last visit was in many respects the most satisfactory, and indeed it witnessed a triumph in my career as an Egyptologist that would be a crowning achievement, were it not for—but we won't speak of that —yet.

"I wonder, Madden, if you know anything about the ancient Egyptian religious ceremonies and forms of worship? Anyway, I may tell you that the Nile dwellers, as they were called, recognized as their supreme deity, Osiris, lord of the underworld. By some he has been identified with the Sun and, with the forty assessors of the dead, he was supposed to have judged the souls brought before him by Horus in the double halls of truth, after their good and evil deeds had been weighed by Anubis.

"The Egyptians reverenced Osiris with as devout worship as the Chinese give to Buddha, and the high priests of Osiris were regarded with almost as much awe as the deity himself.

"In all our studies and investigations, however, we have never been able actually to identify Osiris, but it is now generally conceded that he was believed to have lived on earth at one time and that it was only after his death that he assumed deific prerogatives. In this respect the modern Christian theology may be said to resemble the more ancient form to some extent.

"Osiris was pictured on many of the tablets as a creature with the head of a bull, though there is some disagreement on this score. In any event, his tomb was said to exist near Heliopolis, and it was to investigate this tradition that I made my last trip to Egypt."

Sir Richard paused to relight his cigar and listened to the storm which raged without. Again he gave that hasty, apprehensive glance about him, then proceeded:

"It would be impossible for me to explain to you, a layman, my inordinate joy at finding—by what means and after what tedious labor, I won't stop to tell now—a deserted tomb which I knew, from certain hieroglyphic markings I found, was the very one of which I had been in search for the best part of half a year.

"Understand that this whole tradition of the tomb of Osiris was regarded by my fellow scientists as a myth, and if it had been publicly known that I was giving it sufficient credence to spend a lot of time and money searching for it I should have been looked upon as a madman and laughed out of the societies. This may enable you to appreciate more fully my sensations on actually locating at least the tomb. What I should find within, I hardly dared conjecture!

"The tomb of a God! Can you imagine it, Madden?

"And yet, if I had only stopped there! If only I had been content to pause with the knowledge I already possessed, without proceeding further and desecrating with sacrilegious hands that lonely sarcophagus in the desert!

"How I succeeded in penetrating this tomb, of the horrors of bats and crawling things that failed to stop me—of the almost supernatural awe that came upon me—I can not pause to tell. It is enough to say that I stood at last beside the tremendous coffin of stone, trembling from an unknown dread. And, as I stood there, something white fluttered by me and up through the opening into the outer air. A sacred Ibis—but how it had penetrated there and how it had lived, I can not say.

"Pour out another brandy, Madden—and throw that other log on the fire, too, if you don't mind. My, how the wind blows! Did you speak? . . . Pardon me—I'm nervous tonight as I said before, very nervous. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes—

"That great sarcophagus stood before me, and on it I saw inscribed the sacred scarabæus and the feather of truth, while in the center was the word—the one, wonderful name—'Heseri'—which is the Egyptian for Osiris!

"Insatiable curiosity now took the place of the reverential awe that should have possessed me, and with vandal hands I forced the stone lid from the casket. One glance I had of a great, bovine face, a *living* face, whose eyes looked into the depths of my soul—and then I fled as though all the devils of Amenti were at my heels. . . .

"That is all Madden, except that I am nervous—fearfully so. It is so unlike me. You know how small a part fear has played in my life. I have faced the dreaded simoon; I have been lost among savage tribes, I have confronted death in a hundred forms—but *never* have I felt as I do now. I tremble at a sound; my ears trick me into believing that I am always hearing some unusual noise; my appetite is failing, and I am feeling my age as I have never felt it until. . . . Good God! Madden! What was that sound? . . . Oh! *look behind you*, Madden! *Look!* . . ."

AND now I come to that portion of my statement that will probably be refused credence by those who read; but, as I live, it is the truth.

As Sir Richard uttered his last words, he fell forward to his full length upon the hearth rug, even as I turned in obedience to his command. The shadows were heavy in the far corner of the spacious room, but I could see a great, bulky something that swayed there, something that was a part, and yet, seemingly, was independent, of the shadows.

I had a vision of two burning eyes and a black shining muzzle—a heavy, misshapen head. A strange, animal-like, fetid odor was in my nostrils.

I shrieked, and, turning, ran madly from the room, stumbled to the stairs and fled into the wind-swept night.

Failure to Keep Tab on Quitting Time Kills Two

TROY HOCKER and Hugh Simpson, linemen for the Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company, were repairing wires on top of a pole in Oklahoma one afternoon recently. As they worked, they engaged in banter. It was nearly five o'clock —their quitting time—but neither looked at his watch. The engineer down at the power house saw it was ten minutes past five, time to turn on the city's arc lights. He pulled down the switch and sent 2,300 volts out to light the city. The men up on the pole ceased their banter. Their bodies became stiff. Those on the ground laughed. This must be some new prank of the boys. Then someone noticed smoke issuing from Hocker's shoes. Back at the power plant the amperage was fluctuating back and forth, and the engineer knew something was amiss. He threw off the current—but the men were already dead.

A New Story by Julian Kilman, Master of Weird Fiction

THE WELL

JEREMIAH HUBBARD toiled with a team of horses in a piece of ground some distance down the road from his dwelling. When it neared five o'clock in the autumn afternoon, he unwound the lines from his waist, unhooked the traces and started home with his horses.

He was a heavy man, a bit under middle age, with a dish-shaped face and narrow-set eyes. He walked with vigor. One of the horses lagged a trifle, and he struck it savagely with a short whip.

They came presently to the Eldridge dwelling, abandoned and tumbled down, on the opposite side of the road. The farm was being worked on shares by a man named Simpson, who lived five miles away and drove a "tin Lizzie." An ancient oak tree, the tremendous circumference of its trunk marred by signs of decay, reared splendid gnarled branches skyward.

These branches shaded a disused well—a well that had been the first one in Nicholas County, having been dug in the early fifties by the pioneering Eldridge family. It went forty feet straight down into the residual soil characteristic of the *locale*, but, owing to improved drainage, it had become dry. Nothing remained of the old pump-house, save the crumbling circle of stonework around the mouth, to give evidence of its one-time majesty.

A child of eight ran from the rear of the premises. Hubbard frowned and stopped his team.

"You better keep away from there," he growled, "or you'll fall into the well."

The girl glanced at him impishly.

"You an' Missus Hubbard don't speak to each other, do you?"

Hubbard's face went black. His whip sprang out and caught the girl about the legs. She yelped and ran.

An eighth of a mile farther along the road Hubbard turned in and drove his team to a big barn. He fed his stock. It was after six when he entered the house. This was a structure that, by comparison with the gigantic barn in the rear, seemed pigmy-like.

A sallow, flat-chested woman, with a wisp of hair twisted into a knot, took from Hubbard the two pails of milk he carried. She set them in the kitchen. The two exchanged no words.

Hubbard strode to the washstand, his boots thumping the floor, and performed his ablutions. He rumpled his hair and beard, using much soap and water and blowing stertorously. In the dining-room a girl of twelve sat with a book. As her father came in she glanced at him timorously.

He gave no heed to her as he slumped down into a chair standing before a desk. The desk was littered with papers, among which were typewritten sheets of the sort referred to as "pleadings"; there was a title-search much bethumbed and black along the edges, where the "set-outs" had been scanned with obvious care.

The man adjusted a pair of antiquated spectacles to his dish-face. To do this he was compelled to pull the ends of the bows tight back over the ears as his nose afforded practically no bridge to support the glasses.

Presently he spoke to the girl:

"Tell your mother to bring on the supper."

The girl hastened out, and shortly thereafter the mother appeared carrying dishes. Food was disposed about the table in silence. The farmer ate gustily and in ten minutes finished his meal. Then he addressed his daughter, keeping his eyes averted from his wife. "Tell your mother," he said, "that I'll want breakfast at five o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Where you goin', Pa?" asked the girl.

"I'm goin' to drive to the county seat to see Lawyer Simmons."

Hubbard's gaze followed the girl as she helped clear the table.

"Look-a here," he said. "You been a-talkin' to that Harper child?"

"No," returned the daughter, with a trace of spirit. "But I jest saw her father over by the fence."

"What was he a-doin' there?"

"I didn't stay. I was afeard he'd catch me watchin' him."

Hubbard glowered and reached for his hat.

"I'll find out," he snarled.

Walking rapidly, he crossed a field of wheat stubble, keeping his eyes fixed sharply ahead. It was dusk, but presently, at the northern extremity of his premises, he made out the figure of a man.

"Hey, Harper!" he shouted. "You let that fence be."

He ran forward swiftly.

The men were now separated by two wire-strand fences that paralleled each other only three feet apart. These fences, matching one another for a distance of about two hundred yards—each farmer claiming title to the fence on the side farthest from his own—represented the basis of the litigation over the boundary claim that had gone on between them for four years.

The odd spectacle of the twin fences had come to be one of the show places in the county. It had been photographed and shown in agricultural journals.

"I don't trust ye, Harper," announced Hubbard, breathing hard. "You got the inside track with Jedge Bissell, an' the two of you are a-schemin' to beat me."

A laugh broke from the other.

"I'll beat you, all right," he said coolly. "But it won't be because Judge Bissell is unfair."

His manner enraged Hubbard, who rushed swiftly at the first fence and threw himself over. With equal celerity, he clambered over the second fence.

Startled at the sudden outburst of temper, Harper had drawn back. He held aloft a spade. Hubbard leaped at him. The spade descended.

Harper was slightly-built, however, and the force of the blow did not halt the infuriated man, now swinging at him with all his might. They clinched. Hubbard's fingers caught at the throat of the smaller man, and the two stumbled to the ground, Hubbard atop. The fall broke his grip. With his huge fists he began to hammer the body. He continued until it was limp.

Then, his rage suddenly appeased, he drew back and stared at the inert figure lying strangely quiet.

"So!" he gasped.

There came the sound of someone singing, the voice floating distinctly

through the night air. Hubbard recognized it for that of an itinerant Free Methodist minister, whose church in Ovid he and his family occasionally attended.

The song rolling forth, as the Man of God drove along the highway in his rig, was *Jesus, Lover of My Soul.*

FOR the moment Hubbard shielded his face with an arm as if to ward off an invisible thing.

Then, bending over the prostrate form, he ran his hand inside the clothing to test the action of the heart. He performed the act mechanically, because he knew he had killed his man.

He discovered the handbag. Evidently Harper was on his way to Ovid to catch the train to the county seat for the trial on the morrow. This meant that he would not be missed by his wife for at least twenty-four hours.

The murderer studied his next move. Where to secrete the body? A piece of wood lay back of him, but he was aware that it was constantly combed by squirrel hunters. He thought of the railroad. Why not an accident? Killed by the very train he was bound for?

He started to lug the body toward the track which passed half a mile to the north. Realizing, however, that for the time at hand the distance was too great, he let the body slide to the ground. Next he stole along the twin fences to the highway and peered both ways. No one seemed abroad.

He came back on the dead run, and in twenty minutes he had carried the body to the Eldridge premises and flung it down the ancient well.

When he returned he found his wife and daughter together in the parlor, where with the itinerant preacher, all three were kneeling on the floor in prayer. Hubbard unceremoniously nudged the clergyman.

"That'll do," he said.

The minister rose, his tall, lanky figure towering over Hubbard.

"Brother," he began, in an orotund voice, "come with the Lord—"

"Yes. I know," returned Hubbard, with a patience that surprised his wife. "But I've got something to talk over with my family." He paused. "Here," he added, feeling in his pocket and producing a small coin, "take this and go along."

When the preacher had left, Hubbard called to his daughter.

"Harper was gone when I got over to the fence."

"What kept you so long?"

"I walked over to the woods. There's a nest of coons. They're a-goin' to play havoc with the corn." He smiled unnaturally. "Look-a here! If we can catch 'em, I'll give you the money their pelts bring."

Hubbard divined that his acting was poor. Both the girl and his wife were frankly regarding him.

"Well!" he shouted. "What's the matter with ye?"

"Oh, nuthin', Pa, nuthin'," whimpered the girl.

"Then go to bed, the two of ye."

Next morning Hubbard started for the county seat, a ten mile drive. He returned that evening and complained that the case had been adjourned because Harper had failed to appear in court.

The following day he went back to his field far down the road for more ploughing. Twice he was called to the roadside by passersby to discuss the disappearance of Harper.

One morning a week later, when he came along the road with his team, he discovered the Harper child on the Eldridge premises. She was sitting at the edge of the well.

With a suppressed oath, he dropped the lines and half-walked, half-ran, to where the little girl sat.

"Didn't I tell you to stay away from there!" he exploded.

The girl stared at him, but made no move, though her lips quivered. Hubbard glanced back to observe the road. Then he caught her arm.

"Go home!" he shouted.

He spun her roughly. She continued to stare at him as she retreated homeward.

All that morning Hubbard worked his horses hard. He realized that he was eager to go back by the Eldridge dwelling. Promptly at twelve o'clock, therefore, he tied his team and started up the road. A flash of relief came to him when he did not observe the little girl. It left him cold, however.

"Eatin' dinner," he mumbled.

He moved off, without looking into the well. Until four o'clock that afternoon he labored. On his way home he discovered the girl again seated by the well. She was bending over and acting queerly.

Hurrying his horses to the roadside, he looped the lines over one of the posts in the old "snake" fence. As he approached, he saw her toss a piece of stone down the hole.

Hubbard waited until he was sure of his voice.

"Come with me," he said.

Gripping the girl he started with her toward her home but a short distance away. When they arrived the front door was ajar. A woman, with eyes red from weeping, looked at Hubbard in silence.

"Here!" he said gruffly. "This child ought to be kept to home. She'll fall into the well."

Mrs. Harper merely reached out her arms for her daughter. Hubbard remained standing awkwardly.

"Have you heard anything of Harper yet?" he asked.

"I don't want to talk to you," replied the woman.

Hubbard turned on his heel. Waiting for him by his horses, was the deputy sheriff. The two further discussed the disappearance.

"If you yourself wasn't so well known, Jeremiah," finally declared the official, "they'd sure be thinkin' you was in it some way."

"Why?" grunted the farmer, as he untied the lines.

"Well, everybody knows you an' Harper been lawin' it for years over that boundary line."

Hubbard achieved a laugh.

"I'll tell ye where Harper is. He's cleared out, that's what I think—deserted his family."

That night, and many following nights, Hubbard did not sleep. Some weeks later a tremendous electric storm broke in the night. One particularly heavy clap so startled the wakeful Hubbard that he leaped from his bed and dressed. In the pouring rain he started out.

Inevitably his steps took him toward the well. It was black, and he could not see at first. But another flash came, and he observed a strange thing:

The huge oak, standing at the side of the well, had been split in two by lightning, and one portion of the tree had fallen over the mouth of the hole.

NEXT MORNING Simpson, the man with the "tin Lizzie," stopped at Hubbard's place. He was a blunt-spoken, red-faced man whom Hubbard hated.

"That was a bad storm last night," he said. "The lightning struck the big oak tree by the well."

"What of it?" snapped Hubbard.

"There was a skeleton in the center of that tree," explained Simpson. "I was talking this morning with the sheriff over the telephone. He said seventy-five years ago a man was murdered in Ovid, and they never found his body. This skeleton must be his."

Hubbard cleared his throat sharply.

"What did you do with it?"

"The skull and one of the leg bones fell down into the well when I tried to gather them up. I want to borrow some rope so I can down in there."

For a bare second Hubbard was silent.

"What you ought to do," he said, gathering himself, "is to fill up that hole. It's dangerous."

"Yes. That's so. But I'm goin' to get that skull first. It'll be a good exhibit. I'm wonderin' whether we'll ever find Harper's skeleton."

"Wait a moment," said Hubbard huskily, starting for the barn. "I'll get some rope and help you."

The two returned to the Eldridge farm. They found there the dead man's child. She had perched herself on the fallen tree.

"Damn fool!" muttered Hubbard. "Her mother lettin' her play around here!"

A pulley was rigged over the branch and the rope inserted with a board for a rest.

"I'll go down," vouchsafed Hubbard.

Simpson looked his surprise as he assented.

It took Hubbard five minutes or so to retrieve the missing skeleton parts. He brought them up, the leg bone and the grinning skull. He was pale when he hauled himself over the edge.

"I'm a-goin' to fill up that hole myself," he said.

"All right," retorted Simpson, handling the skull curiously. "Go to it."

Word traveled of the finding of the ancient skeleton, and the inhabitants began driving thither to see the sight. Simpson, a man of some ingenuity, had wired the bleached white bones together and suspended them from one of the branches of the fallen tree. The skeleton dangled and swung in the wind.

Hubbard, maddened by the delay and publicity, felt himself wearing away. He had become obsessed with conviction that if the hole were filled his mind would be at rest.

The nights of continued sleeplessness were ragging his nerves, and he was by this time unable to remain in bed. He would throw himself down, fully dressed, waiting until the others were asleep. Then he would steal out.

At first he had merely walked the roads, swinging his arms and mumbling. But as the night progressed his stride would quicken, and frequently he would take to running. He would run until his lungs were bursting and a slaver fed from his mouth. Late travelers began to catch glimpses of the fleeting figure, and the rumor grew that a ghost was haunting the locality of the well—that the skeleton walked.

Hubbard grew haggard. But he found himself unable to discontinue his nocturnal prowls, some of which took him miles, but all of which invariably wound up at one place—the well.

Here, fagged and exhausted, he would sit until the approach of dawn, staring at the swinging skeleton, mouthing incoherencies, praying, singing hymns beneath his breath, laughing. At the approach of dawn he would steal home.

At last, after interest in the skeleton has subsided and Simpson had consented to its removal, Hubbard loaded his wagon with stones and small boulders and started for the well. That first forenoon he made three trips, dumping each time a considerable quantity of stones.

Next morning he worked in an additional trip. He began to experience surcease. But on the afternoon of the second day, when he made another trip, Simpson came over from his work in an adjoining field.

"I wanted to see you yesterday," he said, quizzically regarding Hubbard. "Mrs. Harper was here. She said her little girl was playin' around here and dropped a pair of andirons down the well."

"What of it?" Hubbard jerked out.

"You got to get 'em out."

"Why?"

"Because them andirons is relics."

"But you gave me permission to fill the hole."

"I was kiddin' you," laughed Simpson. "I'm only rentin' the farm. I ain't got nothin' to do with the house and yard."

Without a word Hubbard turned to his wagon. He got onto the seat and drove off. In an hour he came back with the same rope that had been used to recover the missing portions of the skeleton. Also, he brought with him a farm laborer who did occasional work for him.

Simpson regarded Hubbard amusedly as the latter adjusted once more the pulley, arranged a bucket and then hitched his team to the end of the rope.

Patiently, bucketful by bucketful, the stones were elevated and dumped. Down below in the black interior, Hubbard labored for an hour. At six o'clock he had not found the andirons. Twice he had been compelled to come up for fresh air.

His last trip up left him so white-faced and weak that he was forced to go home.

That night he resorted to sleeping powders. But he lay and tossed, wide-eyed, through the dark hours. Sometime after midnight he got up. A light was still burning in his wife's room, and, tiptoeing down the hall, he paused at her door. In low voices the mother and daughter were conversing. To his heated imagination it seemed certain they were talking of Harper's disappearance.

Mumbling to himself he left the house. He ran down the lane to the highway and along this until he came to the Eldridge place. He determined not to stop, and succeeded in running by, like a frightened animal.

His gait accelerated. It was one best described as scurrying, as he ran crouched and low. He thought he saw some one approaching. This turned him. Back he fled with the speed of the wind.

Drawn by an irresistible force, he made straight for the Eldridge pathway. He came to the well, the entrance of which gaped at him. For a moment he stood, with eyes wide open, staring into the black depths.

Then, screaming, he plunged in head-first.

His cry, long-drawn and eerie, hung quivering on the night air.

In the Hubbard home, a quarter of a mile away, the mother and daughter heard it. The two listened with palpitating hearts. They caught one another's hands.

In a hoarse whisper the mother exclaimed:

"What's that?"

Otis Adelbert Kline, Author of "The Thing of a Thousand Shapes," Spins Another "Spooky" Yarn for the Readers of WEIRD TALES

The Phantom Wolfhound

DOCTOR DORP reluctantly laid aside the manuscript on which he had been working, capped and pocketed his fountain pen, and rose to meet his callers.

He was visibly annoyed by this, the third interruption of the afternoon, but his look of irritation changed to a welcoming smile when he saw the bulky form that was framed in the doorway. He recognized Harry Hoyne of the Hoyne Detective Agency, a heavy-set, florid-faced man whose iron gray hair and moustache proclaimed him well past middle age.

The slender, stoop-shouldered individual who accompanied him was a total stranger. He had pale, hawklike features, small snaky eyes that glittered oddly from cavernous sockets, and long, bony fingers that suggested the claws of a bird.

"Hello, Doc," boomed the detective genially, crushing the hand of his host in his great, muscular paw. "Meet Mr. Ritsky."

The doctor was conscious of a cold, clammy sensation as he took the hand of the stranger and acknowledged the introduction. Was it the contrast between those chill fingers and the strong warm ones of the detective that had caused this feeling? He did not know; but somehow, instinctively, he disliked Mr. Ritsky.

"I've got a queer case for you, Doc," said Hoyne, taking a proffered cigar and inserting it far back in his cheek, unlighted. "Just your specialty—ghosts and all that. I told Mr. Ritsky you'd be the only man to unravel the mystery for him. Was over to his house last night and the thing got me—too unsubstantial—too damned elusively unreal. And yet I'll swear there was something there. I heard it; but it got away and didn't leave a trace. When it comes to finger prints and things like that you know I ain't exactly a dumb-bell, but I gotta admit this thing, whatever it is, had me hopelessly horn-swoggled."

Ritsky declined a cigar, saying he didn't dare smoke because of heart trouble. The doctor selected one with care, lighted it slowly, puffed it with a relish, and settled back with a look of eager anticipation in his eyes.

"What happened last night?" he asked.

"Maybe we better begin at the beginning," said Hoyne. "You see, there's quite a story goes along with this case, and Mr. Ritsky can tell it better than I. Don't be afraid to give him all the dope, Mr. Ritsky. The doctor knows all about such things—wrote a book about 'em, in fact. Let's see. What was the name of that book, Doc?"

"'Investigations of Materialization Phenomena.'"

"Righto! I never can remember it. Anyhow, Mr. Ritsky, tell him your story and ask him all the questions you want to. He's headquarters on this stuff."

Ritsky studied his clawlike hands for a moment, clasping and unclasping the bony fingers. Suddenly he looked up.

"Do animals have immortal souls?" he asked, anxiously.

"I'm afraid you have sadly overrated my ability as a recorder of scientific facts," replied the doctor, smiling slightly. "Frankly, I do not know. I don't believe anyone knows. Most people think they haven't, and I incline toward that belief."

"Then such a thing as a ghost of a—a hound could not be?"

"I would not say that. Nothing is impossible. There are undoubtedly more things in heaven and earth, as Shakespeare said, than we have dreamed of in our philosophy. However, I would consider a materialization of the disembodied spirit of a canine, or any of the other lower animals, as highly improbable."

"But if you saw one with your own eyes—"

"I should probably be inclined to doubt the evidence of my senses. Have *you* seen one?"

"Have I *seen* one?" groaned Ritsky. "Good Lord, man, I'd give every cent I own to be rid of that thing! For two years it's turned my nights into hell! From a perfectly healthy, normal human being I've been reduced to a physical wreck. Sometimes I think my reason is slipping. The thing will either kill me or drive me mad if it is not stopped."

He buried his face in his hands.

"This is most strange," said the doctor. "You say the apparition first troubled you two years ago?"

"Not in its present form. But it was there, nevertheless. The first time I saw it was shortly after I killed that cursed dog. A month, to be exact. I shot him on the twenty-first of August, and he, or it, or *something*, came back to haunt me on the twenty-first of September.

"How vividly I remember the impressions of that first night of terror! How I tried, the next day, to make myself believe it was only a dream—that such a thing could not be. I had retired at eleven o'clock, and was awakened from a sound sleep some time between one and two in the morning by the whining, yapping cry of a dog. As there were no dogs on the premises, you can imagine my surprise.

"I was about to get up when something directly over the foot of my bed riveted my attention. In the dim light it appeared a grayish white in color, and closely resembled the head and pendant ears of a hound. I noticed, with horror, that it was moving slowly toward me, and I was temporarily paralyzed with fright when it emitted a low, cavernous growl.

"Driving my muscles by a supreme effort of will, I leaped from the bed and switched on the light. In the air where I had seen the thing hanging there was nothing. The door was bolted and the windows were screened. There was nothing unusual in the room, as I found after a thorough search. Mystified, I hunted through the entire house from top to bottom, but without finding a trace of the thing, whatever it was, that had made the sounds.

"From that day to this I have never laid my head on a pillow with a feeling of security. At first it visited me at intervals of about a week. These intervals were gradually shortened until it came every night. As its visits became more frequent the apparition seemed to grow. First it sprouted a small body like that of a terrier, all out of proportion to the huge head. Each night that body grew a little larger until it assumed the full proportions of a Russian wolfhound. Recently it has attempted to attack me, but I have always frustrated it by switching on the light."

"Are you positive that you have not been dreaming all this?" asked the doctor.

"Would it be possible for some one else to hear a dream of mine?" countered Ritsky. "We have only been able to retain one servant on account of those noises. All, with the exception of our housekeeper, who is quite deaf, heard the noises and left us as a result."

"Who are the members of your household?"

"Other than the housekeeper and myself, there is only my niece and ward, a girl of twelve."

"Has she heard the noises?"

"She has never mentioned them."

"Why not move to another apartment?"

"That would do no good. We have moved five times in the last two years. When the thing first started we were living on the estate of my niece near Lake Forest. We left the place in charge of care-takers and moved to Evanston. The apparition followed us. We moved to Englewood. The thing moved with us. We have had three different apartments in Chicago since. It came to all of them with equal regularity."

"Would you mind writing for me the various addresses at which you have lived?"

"Not at all, if they will assist in solving this mystery."

The doctor procured a pencil and a sheet of note paper, and Ritsky put down the addresses.

Doctor Dorp scanned them carefully.

"Villa Rogers," he said. "Then your niece is Olga Rogers, daughter of millionaire James Rogers and his beautiful wife, the former Russian dancer, both of whom were lost with the *Titanic*?"

"Olga's mother was my sister. After the sudden death of her parents, the court appointed me her guardian and trustee of the estate."

"I believe that is all the information we need for the present, Mr. Ritsky. If you have no objection I will call on you after dinner this evening, and if Mr. Hoyne cares to accompany me we will see what we can do toward solving this mystery. Please take care that no one in your home is apprised of the object of our visit. Say, if you wish, that we are going to install some electrical equipment."

"I'll be there with bells," said Hoyne as they rose to go.

II.

SHORTLY after his guests' departure, Doctor Dorp was speeding out Sheridan Road toward Villa Rogers.

The drive took nearly an hour, and he spent another half-hour in questioning the care-takers, man and wife. He returned home with a well-filled notebook, and on his arrival he began immediately assembling paraphernalia for the evening's work. This consisted of three cameras with specially constructed shutters, several small electrical mechanisms, a coil of insulated wire, a flash-gun, and a kit of tools.

After dinner he picked up Hoyne at his home, and they started for the "haunted house."

"You say you investigated this case last night, Hoyne?" asked the doctor.

"I tried to, but there was nothing to it, so far as I could see, except the whining of that dog."

"Where were you when you heard the noises?"

"Ritsky had retired. I slept in a chair in his room. About two o'clock I was awakened by a whining noise, not loud, yet distinctly audible. Then I heard a yell from Ritsky. He switched on the light a moment later, then sat down on the bed, trembling from head to foot, while beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"'Did you see it?' he asked me.

"'See what?' I said.

"'The hound.'

"I told him I hadn't seen a thing, but I heard the noise all right. Between you and me, though, I did think I saw a white flash for a second beside his bed, but I can't swear to it."

"We won't trust our eyes tonight," said the doctor. "I have three eyes in that case that will not be affected by hysteria or register hallucinations."

"Three eyes? What are you talking about?

"Cameras, of course."

"But how—"

"Wait until we get there. I'll show you."

A few moments later they were admitted to the apartment by the housekeeper, a stolid woman of sixty or thereabout. Ritsky presented them to his niece, a dreamy-eyed, delicately pretty school girl with silky golden curls that glistened against the pale whiteness of her skin.

"If you don't mind," said the doctor, "we will look things over now. It will take some time to install the wiring and make other necessary preparations."

Ritsky showed them through the apartment, which was roomy, furnished in good taste and artistically decorated. The floor plan was quite simple and ordinary. First came the large living-room that extended across the front of the house. This opened at the right into the dining-room and at the center into a hallway which led through to the back of the building. Behind the dining-room was the kitchen, and behind that the servant's room. Ritsky's bedroom was directly across the hall from the dining-room. Then came his niece's bedroom, a spare bedroom and a bathroom. Each of the three front bedrooms was equipped with a private bath and large clothes-closet.

The doctor began by installing the three cameras in Ritsky's room, fastening them on the wall in such a manner that they faced the bed from three directions. After focusing them properly, he set the flash-gun on a collapsible tripod and pointed it toward the bed.

The room was lighted by an alabaster bowl that depended from the ceiling and could be turned on or off by a switch at the bedside. There were, in addition, two wall lights, one on each side of the dresser, and a small reading lamp on a table in one corner. These last three lights were operated by individual pull-cords.

Ritsky procured a step-ladder for him, and, after switching off the drop light, he removed one of the bulbs from the cluster and inserted a four-way socket. From this socket he ran wires along the ceiling and down the wall to the three cameras and the flash-gun. By the time these preparations were completed Miss Rogers and the housekeeper had retired.

Hoyne surveyed the finished job with frank admiration.

"If there's anything in this room when Ritsky turns the switch those three mechanical eyes will sure spot it," he said enthusiastically.

"Now, Mr. Ritsky," began the doctor, "I want you to place yourself entirely in our hands for the night. Keep cool, fear nothing, and carry out my instructions to the letter. I suggest that you go to bed now and endeavor to get some sleep. If the apparition troubles you, do just as you have done in the past—turn on the light. Do not, however, touch the light switch unless the thing appears. The photographic plates, when developed, will tell whether you have been suffering from a mere hallucination induced by auto-suggestion or if genuine materialization phenomena have occurred."

After closing and bolting the windows they placed the step-ladder in the hallway beside Ritsky's door. Then they obtained a duplicate key from him and asked him to lock himself in, removing his key so they might gain entrance at any time.

When everything was ready they quietly brought two chairs into the hall from the spare bedroom and began their silent vigil.

III.

BOTH MEN sat in silence for nearly three hours. The doctor seemed lost in thought, and Hoyne nervously masticated his inevitable unlighted cigar. The house was quiet, except for the ticking of the hall clock and its hourly chiming announcements of the flight of time.

Shortly after the clock struck two they heard a low, scarcely audible moan.

"What was that?" whispered the detective, hoarsely.

"Wait!" the doctor replied.

Presently it was repeated, followed by prolonged sobbing.

"It's Miss Rogers," said Hoyne, excitedly.

Doctor Dorp rose and softly tiptoed to the door of the child's bed chamber. After listening there for a moment he noiselessly opened the door and entered. Presently he returned, leaving the door ajar. The sobbing and moaning continued.

"Just as I expected," he said. "I want you to go in the child's room, keep quiet, and make a mental note of everything you see and hear. Stay there until I call you, and be prepared for a startling sight."

"Wh—what is it?" asked Hoyne, nervously.

"Nothing that will hurt you. What's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Afraid, hell!" growled Hoyne. "Can't a man ask you a question—"

"No time to answer questions now. Get in there and do as I say if you want to be of any assistance."

"All right, Doc. It's your party."

The big detective entered the room of the sobbing child and squeezed his great bulk into a dainty rocking chair from which he could view her bed. She tossed from side to side, moaning as if in pain, and Hoyne, pitying her, wondered why the doctor did not awaken her.

Presently she ceased her convulsive movements, clenched her hands, and uttered a low, gurgling cry, as a white, filmy mass slowly emerged from between her lips. The amazed detective stared with open mouth, so frightened that he forgot to chew his cigar. The filmy material continued to pour forth for several minutes that seemed like hours to the tense watcher. Then it formed a nebulous, wispy cloud above the bed, completely detached itself from the girl, and floated out through the half-opened door.

"Doctor Dorp, standing in the hallway, saw a white, misty thing of indefinite outline emerge from the bedroom. It floated through the hall and paused directly in front of Ritsky's door. He approached it cautiously and noiselessly, and noticed that it grew rapidly smaller. Then he discovered the reason. It was flowing *through the keyhole!*

In a short time it had totally disappeared. He waited breathlessly.

What was that? The whining cry of a hound broke the stillness! He mounted the step-ladder in order to view the interior of the room through the glass transom. He had scarcely placed his foot on the second step when the whining noise changed to a gurgling growl that was followed by a shriek of mortal terror and the dull report of the flash-gun.

Leaping down from the ladder, the doctor called Hoyne, and they entered the "haunted" bed chamber. The room was brilliantly lighted by the alabaster bowl and filled with the sickening fumes of flash-powder.

Hoyne opened the windows and returned to where the doctor was thoughtfully viewing Ritsky, who had apparently fainted. He had fallen half out of bed, and hung there with one bony arm trailing and his emaciated face a picture of abject fear.

"My God!" exclaimed Hoyne. "Look there on his throat and chest. *The frothy slaver of a hound!*"

The doctor took a small porcelain dish from his pocket, removed the lid, and with the blade of his pocket knife, scraped part of the slimy deposit into the receptacle.

"Hadn't we better try to bring him to?" inquired Hoyne.

After they had lifted him back in bed the doctor leaned over and held his ear to the breast of the recumbent man. He took his stethoscope from his case and listened again. Then he straightened gravely.

"No earthly power can bring him to," he said, softly. "*Ritsky is dead!*"

IV.

THE DETECTIVE remained in the house, pending the arrival of the coroner and undertaker, while Doctor Dorp hurried home with his paraphernalia and the sample of slime he had scraped from the corpse. Hoyne was puzzled by the fact that the doctor searched the house and the clothing of the dead man before departing.

The detective was kept busy at the Ritsky apartment until nearly ten o'clock. After stopping at a restaurant for a bit of breakfast and a cup of coffee, he went directly to the doctor's home.

He found the psychologist in his laboratory, engrossed in a complicated chemical experiment. He shook a test tube, which he had been heating over a small alcohol lamp, held it up to the light, stood it in a small rack in which were a number of others partly filled with liquid, and nodded cordially to his friend.

"Morning, Doc." greeted Hoyne. "Have you doped out what we are going to tell the coroner yet?"

"I knew the direct cause of Ritsky's death long ago. It was fear. The indirect cause, the thing that induced the fear, required careful examination and considerable chemical research."

"And it was—"

"Psychoplasm."

"I don't get you, Doc. What is psychoplasm?"

"No doubt you have heard of the substance called ectoplasm, regarding which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has delivered numerous lectures, or an identical substance called teleplasm, discovered by Baron Von Schrenck Notzing while attending materialization seances with the medium known as Eva.

"While the baron was observing and photographing this substance in Europe, my friend and colleague, Professor James Braddock, was conducting similar investigations in this country. He named the substance psychoplasm, and I like the name better than either of the other two, as it is undoubtedly created or generated from invisible particles of matter through the power of the subjective mind.

"I have examined and analyzed many samples of this substance in the past. The plate I now have under the compound microscope, and the different chemical determinations I have just completed, show conclusively that this is psychoplasm."

"But how—where did it come from?"

"I learned something of the history of Ritsky and his ward yesterday. Let me enlighten you on that score first:

"The man told the truth when he said he was appointed guardian of his niece, and also when he said that he had shot a dog. The dog, in question, was a Russian wolfhound, a present sent to the girl by her parents while they were touring Russia. He was only half grown when he arrived, and the two soon became boon companions, frolicking and playing about the grounds together or romping through the big house.

"Some time after the death of Olga's parents, Ritsky, then editor of a radical newspaper in New York, took up his abode at Villa Rogers. The dog, by that time full grown, took a violent dislike to him and, on one occasion, bit him quite severely. When he announced his intention of having the animal shot the girl wept violently and swore that she would kill herself if Shag, as she had named him, were killed. It seemed that she regarded him as a token of the love of her parents who had sailed away, never to return."

"*Shag!* That's the name!" broke in Hoyne, excitedly. "After that white thing floated out of the room she made noises like a dog and then answered them, saying 'Good old Shag,' and patting an imaginary head. She sure gave me the creeps, though, when she let out that growl."

"The vengeful Ritsky," continued the doctor, "was determined that Shag should die, and found an opportunity to shoot him with a pistol when the girl was in the house. Shortly after, the faithful creature dragged himself to the feet of his mistress and died in her arms. He could not tell her who had taken his life, but she must have known subjectively, and as a result entertained a hatred for her uncle of which she objectively knew nothing.

"Most people have potential mediumistic power. How this power is developed in certain individuals and remains practically dormant in others is a question that has never been satisfactorily explained. I personally believe that it is often developed because of intense emotional repressions which, unable to find an outlet in a normal manner through the objective mind, find expression in abnormal psychic manifestations.

"This seemed to be the case with Olga Rogers. She developed the power subjectively without objective knowledge that it existed. One of the most striking of psychic powers is that of creating or assembling the substance called psychoplasm, causing it to assume various forms, and to move as if endowed with a mind of its own.

"Olga developed this peculiar power to a remarkable degree. Acting under the direction of her subjective intelligence, the substance assumed the form of her beloved animal companion and sought revenge on its slayer. We arrived a day too late to save the object of her unconscious hatred."

"Too bad you were not there the night before," said Hoyne. "The poor devil would be alive today if you had been on hand with me the first night to dope the thing out."

"We might have saved him for a prison term or the gallows," replied the doctor, a bit sardonically. "You haven't seen this, of course."

He took a small silver pencil from the table and handed it to the detective.

"What's that got to do with—"

"Open it! Unscrew the top. Careful!"

Hoyne unscrewed it gingerly and saw that the chamber, which was made to hold extra leads, was filled with a white powder.

"Arsenic," said the doctor, briefly. "Did you notice the sickly pallor of that girl—the dark rings under her eyes? Her loving uncle and guardian was slowly poisoning her, increasing the doses from time to time. In another month or six weeks she would have been dead, and Ritsky, her nearest living relative, would have inherited her immense fortune."

"Well I'll be damned!" exploded Hoyne.

Doctor Dorp's laboratory assistant entered and handed a package of prints to his employer.

"Here are the proofs of last night's photographs," said the doctor. "Care to see them?"

Hoyne took them to the window and scrutinized them carefully.

All showed Ritsky leaning out of bed, his hand on the light switch, his face contorted in an expression of intense horror—*and, gripping his throat in its ugly jaws, was the white, misshapen phantasm of a huge Russian wolfhound!*

MASTERPIECES OF WEIRD FICTION

No. 2—The Murders in the Rue Morgue

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions are not beyond *all* conjecture.—Sir Thomas Browne, *Urn-Burial*.

THE mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment. As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talents into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method have, in truth, the whole air of intuition. The faculty of resolution is possibly much invigorated by mathematical study, and especially by the highest branch of it which, unjustly, and merely on account of its retrograde operations, has been called, as if *par excellence*, analysis. Yet to calculate is not in itself to analyze. A chess-player, for example, does the one without effort at the other. It follows that the game of chess, in its effects upon mental character, is greatly misunderstood. I am not now writing a treatise, but simply prefacing a somewhat peculiar narrative by observations very much at random; I will therefore, take occasion to assert that the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious game of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess. In this latter, where the pieces have different and *bizarre* motions, the various and variable values, what is only complex is mistaken (a not unusual error) for what is profound. The *attention* is here called powerfully into play. If it flag for an instant, an oversight is committed, resulting in injury or defeat. The possible moves being not only manifold but involute, the chances of such oversights are multiplied; and in nine cases out of ten it is the more concentrative rather than the more acute player who conquers. In draughts, on the contrary, where the moves are *unique* and have but little variation, the probabilities of inadvertence are diminished, and the mere attention being left comparatively unemployed, what advantages are obtained by either party are obtained by superior *acumen*. To be less abstract—Let us suppose a game of draughts where the pieces are reduced to four kings, and where, of course, no oversight is to be expected. It is obvious that here the victory can be decided (the players being at all equal) only by some *recherche* movement, the result of some strong exertion of intellect. Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation.

Whist has long been noted for its influence upon what is termed the calculating power; and men of the highest order of intellect have been known to take an apparently unaccountable delight in it, while eschewing chess as frivolous. Beyond doubt there is nothing of a similar nature so greatly tasking the faculty of analysis. The best chess-player in Christendom *may* be little more than the best player of chess; but proficiency in whist implies capacity for success in all these more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind. When I say proficiency, I mean that perfection in the game which includes a comprehension of *all* the sources whence legitimate advantage may be derived. These are not only manifold but multiform, and lie frequently among recesses of thought altogether inaccessible to the ordinary understanding. To observe attentively is to remember distinctly; and, so far, the concentrative chess-player will do very well at whist; while the rules of Hoyle (themselves based upon the mere mechanism of the game) are sufficiently and generally comprehensible. Thus to have a retentive memory, and to proceed by "the book," are points commonly regarded as the sum total of good playing. But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He makes, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. So, perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information obtained, lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation. The necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe. Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game. He examines the countenance of his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents. He considers the mode of assorting the cards in each hand; often counting trump by trump and honor by honor, through the glances bestowed by their holders upon each. He notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or chagrin. From the manner of gathering up a trick he judges whether the person taking it can make another in the suit. He recognizes what is played through feint, by the air with which it is thrown upon the table. A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness or trepidation—all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs. The first two or three rounds having been played, he is in full possession of the contents of each hand, and thenceforward puts down his card with as absolute a precision of purpose as if the rest of the party had turned outward the faces of their own.

The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis. The constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is usually manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered otherwise upon idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals. Between ingenuity and the analytic ability there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a character very strictly analogous. It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic.

The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced.

Residing in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18—, I there became acquainted with a Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. This young gentleman was of an excellent—indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes. By courtesy of his creditors, there still remained in his possession a small remnant of his patrimony; and upon the income arising from this, he managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessaries of life, without troubling himself about its superfluities. Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained.

Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion. We saw each other again and again. I was deeply interested in the little family history which he detailed to me with all that candor which a Frenchman indulges whenever mere self is the theme. I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagination. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price; and this feeling I

frankly confided to him. It was at length arranged that we should live together during my stay in the city; and as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not enquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.

Had the routine of our life at this place been known to the world, we should have been regarded as madmen—although, perhaps, as madmen of a harmless nature. Our seclusion was perfect. We admitted no visitors. Indeed the locality of our retirement had been carefully kept a secret from my own former associates; and it had been many years since Dupin had ceased to know or be known in Paris. We existed within ourselves alone.

It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrerie*, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect *abandon*. The sable divinity would not herself dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence. At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets, arm and arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford.

At such times I could not help remarking and admiring (although from his rich ideality I had been prepared to expect it) a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin. He seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its exercise—if not exactly in its display—and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived. He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own. His manner at these movements was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent.

Let it not be supposed, from what I have just said, that I am detailing any mystery, or penning any romance. What I have described in the Frenchman, was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased intelligence. But of the character of his remarks at the periods in question an example will best convey the idea.

We were strolling one night down a long dirty street, in the vicinity of the Palais Royal. Being both, apparently, occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least. All at once Dupin broke forth with these words:—

"He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the Theatre des Varietes."

"There can be no doubt of that," I replied unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.

"Dupin," said I gravely, "this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of———?" Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.

———"of Chantilly," said he, "why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy."

This was precisely what had formed the subject of my reflections. Chantilly was a *quondam* cobbler of the Rue St. Denis, who, becoming stage-mad, had attempted the *role* of Xerxes, in Crebillon's tragedy so called, and been notoriously Pasquinaded for his pains.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake," I exclaimed, "the method—if method there is—by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter." In fact, I was even more startled than I would have been willing to express.

"It was the fruiterer," replied my friend, "who brought you to the conclusion that the mender of soles was not of sufficient height for Xerxes *et id genus omne*."

"The fruiterer!—you astonish me—I know no fruiterer whomsoever."

"The man who ran up against you as we entered the street—it may have been fifteen minutes ago."

I now remembered that, in fact, a fruiterer, carrying upon his head a large basket of apples, had nearly thrown me down, by accident, as we passed from the Rue C——— into the thoroughfare where we stood; but what this had to do with Chantilly I could not possibly understand.

There was not a particle of *charlatanerie* about Dupin. "I will explain," he said, "and that you may comprehend all clearly, we will first retrace the course of meditations, from the moment in which I spoke to you until that of the *rencontre* with the fruiterer in question. The larger links of the chain run thus—Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer."

There are few persons who have not, at some period of their lives, amused themselves in retracing the steps by which particular conclusions of their own minds have been attained. The occupation is often full of interest; and he who attempts it for the first time is astonished by the apparently illimitable distance and incoherence between the starting-point and the goal. What, then, must have been my amazement when I heard the Frenchman speak what he had just spoken, and when I could not help acknowledging that he had spoken the truth. He continued:

"We had been talking of horses, if I remember aright, just before leaving the Rue C——. This was the last subject we discussed. As we crossed into this street, a fruiterer, with a large basket upon his head, brushing quickly past us, thrust you upon a pile of paving-stones collected at a spot where the causeway is undergoing repair. You stepped upon one of the loose fragments, slipped, slightly strained your ankle, appeared vexed or sulky, muttered a few words, turned to look at the pile, and then proceeded in silence. I was not particularly attentive to what you did; but observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity.

"You kept your eyes upon the ground—glancing, with a petulant expression, at the holes and ruts in the pavement, (so that I saw you were still thinking of the stones,) until we reached the little alley called Lamartine, which had been paved, by way of experiment, with the overlapping and riveted blocks. Here your countenance brightened up, and perceiving your lips move, I could not doubt that you murmured the word 'stereotomy,' a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement. I knew that you could not say to yourself 'stereotomy' without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus; and since, when we discussed this subject not very long ago, I mentioned to you how singularly, yet with how little notice, the vague guesses of that noble Greek had met with confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony, I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upward to the great *nebula* in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up; and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps. But in that bitter tirade upon Chantilly, which appeared in yesterday's *'Musee,'* the satirist, making some disgraceful allusions to the cobbler's change of name upon assuming the buskin, quoted a Latin line about which we have often conversed. I mean the line

Perdidit antiquum litera prima sonum.

I had told you that this was in reference to Orion, formerly written Urion; and, from certain pungencies connected with this explanation, I was aware that you could not have forgotten it. It was clear, therefore, that you would not fail to combine the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly. That you did combine them I saw by the character of the smile which passed over your lips. You thought of the poor cobbler's immolation. So far, you had been stooping in your gait; but now I saw you draw yourself up to your full height. I was then sure that you reflected upon the diminutive figure of Chantilly. At this point I interrupted your meditation to remark that as, in fact, he was a very little fellow—that Chantilly—he would do better at the *Theatre des Varietes*."

Not long after this we were looking over an evening edition of the "Gazette des Tribunaux," when the following paragraphs arrested our attention.

"EXTRAORDINARY MURDERS. — This morning, about three o'clock, the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Roch were aroused from sleep by a succession of terrific shrieks, issuing, apparently, from the fourth story of a house in the Rue Morgue, known to be in the sole occupancy of one Madame L'Espanaye, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye. After some delay, occasioned by a fruitless attempt to produce admission in the usual manner, the gateway was broken in with a crowbar, and eight or ten of the neighbors entered, accompanied by two *gendarmes*. By this time the cries had ceased; but, as the party rushed up the first flight of stairs, two or more rough voices, in angry contention, were distinguished, and seemed to proceed from the upper part of the house. As the second landing was reached, these sounds, also, had ceased, and everything remained perfectly quiet. The party spread themselves and hurried from room to room. Upon arriving at a large back chamber in the fourth story, (the door of which, being found locked, with key inside, was forced open,) a spectacle presented

itself which struck every one present not less with horror than with astonishment.

"The apartment was in the wildest disorder—the furniture broken and thrown about in all directions. There was only one bedstead; and from this the bed had been removed, and thrown into the middle of the floor. On a chair lay a razor, besmeared with blood. On the hearth were two or three long and thick tresses of grey human hair, also dabbled in blood, and seeming to have been pulled out by the roots. Upon the floor were found four Napoleons, an ear-ring of topaz, three large silver spoons, three smaller of *metal d' Alger*, and two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold. The drawers of a *bureau*, which stood in one corner, were open, and had been, apparently, rifled, although many articles still remained in them. A small iron safe was discovered under the bed (not under the bedstead). It was open, with the key still in the door. It had no contents beyond a few old letters, and other papers of little consequence.

"Of Madame L'Espanaye no traces were here seen; but an unusual quantity of soot being observed in the fire-place, a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom; it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance. The body was quite warm. Upon examining it, many excoriations were perceived, no doubt occasioned by the violence with which it had been thrust up and disengaged. Upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails, as if the deceased had been throttled to death.

"After a thorough investigation of every portion of the house, without farther discovery, the party made its way into a small paved yard in the rear of the building, where lay the corpse of the old lady, with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off. The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated—the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity.

"To this horrible mystery there is not as yet, we believe, the slightest clew."

The next day's paper had these additional particulars.

"The Tragedy in the Rue Morgue. Many individuals have been examined in relation to this most extraordinary and frightful affair." [The word *'affaire'* has not yet, in France, that levity of import which it conveys with us,] "but nothing whatever has transpired to throw light upon it. We give below all the material testimony elicited.

"Pauline Dubourg, laundress, deposes that she has known both the deceased for three years, having washed for them during that period. The old lady and her daughter seemed on good terms—very affectionate towards each other. They were excellent pay. Could not speak in regard to their mode or means of living. Believed that Madame L. told fortunes for a living. Was reputed to have money put by. Never met any persons in the house when she called for the clothes or took them home. Was sure that they had no servant in employ. There appeared to be no furniture in any part of the building except in the fourth story.

"Pierre Moreau, tobacconist, deposes that he has been in the habit of selling small quantities of tobacco and snuff to Madame L'Espanaye for nearly four years. Was born in the neighborhood, and has always resided there. The deceased and her daughter had occupied the house in which the corpses were found, for more than six years. It was formerly occupied by a jeweller, who under-let the upper rooms to various persons. The house was the property of Madame L. She became dissatisfied with the abuse of the premises by her tenant, and moved into them herself, refusing to let any portion. The old lady was childish. Witness had seen the daughter some five or six times during the six years. The two lived an exceedingly retired life—were reputed to have money. Had heard it said among the neighbors that Madame L. told fortunes—did not believe it. Had never seen any person enter the door except the old lady and her daughter, a porter once or twice, and a physician some eight or ten times.

"Many other persons, neighbors, gave evidence to the same effect. No one was spoken of as frequenting the house. It was not known whether there were any living connections of Madame L. and her daughter. The shutters of the front windows were seldom opened. Those in the rear were always closed, with the exception of the large back room, fourth story. The house was a good house—not very old.

"Isidore Muset, *gendarme*, deposes that he was called to the house about three o'clock in the morning, and found some twenty or thirty persons at the gateway, endeavoring to gain admittance. Forced it open, at length, with a bayonet—not with a crowbar. Had but little difficulty in getting it open, on account of its being a double or folding gate, and bolted neither at bottom nor top. The shrieks were continued until the gate was forced—and then suddenly ceased. They seemed to be screams of some person (or persons) in great agony—were loud and drawn out, not short and quick. Witness led the way upstairs. Upon reaching the first landing, heard two voices in loud and angry contention—the one a gruff voice, the other much shriller—a very strange voice. Could distinguish some words of the former, which was that of a Frenchman. Was positive that it was not a woman's voice. Could distinguish the words, *'sacre'* and *'diable.'* The shrill voice was that of a foreigner. Could not be sure whether it was the voice of a man or of a woman. Could not make out what was said, but believed the language to be Spanish. The state of the room and of the bodies was described by this witness as we described them yesterday.

"Henri Duval, a neighbor, and by trade a silversmith, deposes that he was one of the party who first entered the house. Corroborates the testimony of Muset in general. As soon as they forced an entrance, they reclosed the door, to keep out the crowd, which collected very fast, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. The shrill voice, the witness thinks, was that of an Italian. Was certain it was not French. Could not be sure that it was a man's voice. It might have been a woman's. Was not acquainted with the Italian language. Could not distinguish the words, but was convinced by the intonation that the speaker was an Italian. Knew Madame L. and her daughter. Had conversed with both frequently. Was sure that the shrill voice was not that of either of the deceased.

"——Odenheimer, restaurateur. The witness volunteered his testimony. Not speaking French, was examined through an interpreter. Is a native of Amsterdam. Was passing the house at the time of the shrieks. They lasted for several minutes—probably ten. They were long and loud—very awful and distressing. Was one of those who entered the building. Corroborated the previous evidence in every respect but one. Was sure that the shrill voice was that of a man—of a Frenchman. Could not distinguish the words uttered. They were loud and quick—unequal—spoken apparently in fear as well as in anger. The voice was harsh—not so much shrill as harsh. Could not call it a shrill voice. The gruff voice said repeatedly *'sacre,' 'diable'* and once *'mon Dieu.'*

"Jules Mignaud, banker of the firm of Mignaud et Fils, Rue Deloraine. Is the elder Mignaud. Madame L'Espanaye had some property. Had opened an account with his banking house in the spring of the year—— (eight years previously). Made frequent deposits in small sums. Had checked for nothing until the third day before her death, when she took out in person the sum of 4000 francs. This sum was paid in gold, and a clerk sent home with the money.

"Adolphe Le Bon, clerk to Mignaud et Fils, deposes that on the day in question, about noon, he accompanied Madame L'Espanaye to her residence with the 4000 francs, put up in two bags. Upon the door being opened, Mademoiselle L. appeared and took from his hands one of the bags, while the old lady relieved him of the other. He then bowed and departed. Did not see any person in the street at the time. It is a bye-street—very lonely.

"William Bird, tailor, deposes that he was one of the party who entered the house. Is an Englishman. Has lived in Paris two years. Was one of the first to ascend the stairs. Heard the voices in contention. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Could make out several words, but cannot now remember all. Heard distinctly *'sacre'* and *'mon Dieu.'* There was a sound at the moment as if of several persons struggling—a scraping and scuffling sound. The shrill voice was very loud—louder than the gruff one. Is sure that it was not the voice of an Englishman. Appeared to be that of a German. Might have been a woman's voice. Does not understand German.

"Four of the above-named witnesses, being recalled, deposed that the door of the chamber in which was found the body of Mademoiselle L. was locked on the inside when the party reached it. Everything was perfectly silent—no groans or noises of any kind. Upon forcing the door no person was seen. The windows, both of the back and front room, were down and firmly fastened from within. A door between the two rooms was closed, but not locked. The door leading from the front room into the passage was locked, with the key on the inside. A small room in the front of the house, on the fourth story, at the head of the passage, was open, the door being ajar. This room was crowded with old beds, boxes, and so forth. These were carefully removed and searched. There was not an inch of any portion of the house which was not carefully searched. Sweeps were sent up and down the chimneys. The house was a four story one, with garrets *(mansardes)*. A trap-door on the roof was nailed down very securely—did not appear to have been opened for years. The time elapsing between the hearing of the voices in contention and the breaking open of the room door, was variously stated by the witnesses. Some made it as short as three minutes—some as long as five. The door was opened with difficulty.

"Alfonso Garcio, undertaker, deposes that he resides in the Rue Morgue. Is a native of Spain. Was one of the party who entered the house. Did not proceed upstairs. Is

nervous, and was apprehensive of the consequences of agitation. Heard the voices in contention. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Could not distinguish what was said. The shrill voice was that of an Englishman—is sure of this. Does not understand the English language, but judges by the intonation.

"*Alberto Montani*, confectioner, deposes that he was among the first to ascend the stairs. Heard the voices in question. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Distinguished several words. The speaker appeared to be expostulating. Could not make out the words of the shrill voice. Spoke quick and unevenly. Thinks it the voice of a Russian. Corroborates the general testimony. Is an Italian. Never conversed with a native of Russia.

"Several witnesses, recalled, here testified that the chimneys of all the rooms on the fourth story were too narrow to admit the passage of a human being. By 'sweeps' were meant cylindrical sweeping-brushes, such as are employed by those who clean chimneys. These brushes were passed up and down every flue in the house. There is no back passage by which any one could have descended while the party proceeded up stairs. The body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye was so firmly wedged in the chimney that it could not be got down until four or five of the party united their strength.

"*Paul Dumas*, physician, deposes that he was called to view the bodies about daybreak. They were both then lying on the sacking of the bedstead in the chamber where Mademoiselle L. was found. The corpse of the young lady was much bruised and excoriated. The fact that it had been thrust up the chimney would sufficiently account for these appearances. The throat was greatly chafed. There were several deep scratches just below the chin, together with a series of livid spots which were evidently the impression of fingers. The face was fearfully discolored, and the eye-balls protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through. A large bruise was discovered upon the pit of the stomach, produced apparently, by the pressure of a knee. In the opinion of M. Dumas, Mademoiselle L'Espanaye had been throttled to death by some person or persons unknown. The corpse of the mother was horribly mutilated. All the bones of the right leg and arm were more or less shattered. The left *tibia* much splintered, as well as all the ribs of the left side. Whole body dreadfully bruised and discolored. It was not possible to say how the injuries had been inflicted. A heavy club of wood, or a broad bar of iron—a chair—any large, heavy, and obtuse weapon would have produced such results, if wielded by the hands of a very powerful man. No woman could have inflicted the blows with any weapon. The head of the deceased, when seen by witness, was entirely separated from the body, and was also greatly shattered. The throat had evidently been cut with some very sharp instrument—probably with a razor.

"*Alexandre Etienne*, surgeon, was called with M. Dumas to view the bodies. Corroborated the testimony, and the opinions of M. Dumas.

"Nothing farther of importance was elicited, although several other persons were examined. A murder so mysterious, and so perplexing in all its particulars, was never before committed in Paris—if indeed a murder had been committed at all. The police are entirely at fault—an unusual occurrence in affairs of this nature. There is not, however, the shadow of a clue apparent."

The evening edition of the paper stated that the greatest excitement still continued in the Quartier St. Roch—that the premises in question had been carefully re-searched, and fresh examinations of witnesses instituted, but all to no purpose. A postscript, however, mentioned that Adolphe Le Bon had been arrested and imprisoned—although nothing appeared to criminate him, beyond the facts already detailed.

Dupin seemed singularly interested in the progress of this affair—at least so I judged from his manner, for he made no comments. It was only after the announcement that Le Bon had been imprisoned, that he asked me my opinion respecting the murders.

I could merely agree with all Paris in considering them an insoluble mystery. I saw no means by which it would be possible to trace the murderer.

"We must not judge of the means," said Dupin, "by this shell of an examination. The Parisian police, so much extolled for *acumen*, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are so ill adapted to the object proposed, as to put us in mind of Monsieur Jourdain's calling for his *robe-de-chambre—pour mieux entendre la musique*. The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail. Vidocq, for example, was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain tops where she is found. The modes and sources of this kind of error are well typified in the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances—to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the *retina* (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly—is to have the best appreciation of its lustre—a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it. A greater number of rays actually fall upon the eye in the latter case, but, in the former, there is the more refined capacity for comprehension. By undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought; and it is very possible to make even Venus herself vanish from the firmament by a scrutiny too sustained, too concentrated, or too direct.

"As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement," [I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing] "and, besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful. We will go and see the premises with our own eyes. I know G———, the Prefect of Police, and shall have no difficulty in obtaing the necessary permission."

The permission was obtained, and we proceeded at once to the Rue Morgue. This is one of those miserable thoroughfares which intervene between the Rue Richelieu and the Rue St. Roch. It was late in the afternoon when we reached it; as this quarter is at a great distance from that in which we resided. The house was readily found; for there were still many persons gazing up at the closed shutters, with an objectless curiosity, from the opposite side of the way. It was an ordinary Parisian house, with a gateway, on one side of which was a glazed watch-box, with a sliding panel in the window, indicating a *loge de concierge*. Before going in we walked up the street, turned down an alley, and then, again turning, passed in the rear of the building—Dupin, meanwhile, examining the whole neighborhood, as well as the house, with a minuteness of attention for which I could see no possible object.

Retracing our steps, we came again to the front of the dwelling, rang, and, having shown our credentials, were admitted by the agents in charge. We went up stairs—into the chamber where the body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye had been found, and where both the deceased still lay. The disorders of the room had, as usual, been suffered to exist. I saw nothing beyond what had been stated in the "Gazette des Tribunaux." Dupin scrutinized every thing—not excepting the bodies of the victims. We then went into the other rooms, and into the yard; a *gendarme* accompanying us throughout. The examination occupied us until dark, when we took our departure. On our way home my companion stopped in for a moment at the office of one of the daily papers.

I have said that the whims of my friend were manifold, and that *Je les menageais*—for this phrase there is no English equivalent. It was his humor, now, to decline all conversation on the subject of the murder, until about noon the next day. He then asked me, suddenly, if I had observed anything *peculiar* at the scene of the atrocity.

There was something in his manner of emphasizing the word "peculiar," which caused me to shudder, without knowing why.

"No, nothing *peculiar*," I said; "nothing more, at least, than we both saw stated in the paper."

"The 'Gazette,'" he replied, "has not entered, I fear, into the unusual horror of the thing. But dismiss the idle opinions of this print. It appears to me that this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded as easy of solution—I mean for the *outre* character of its features. The police are confounded by the seeming absence of motive—not for the murder itself—but for the atrocity of the murder. They are puzzled, too, by the seeming impossibility of reconciling the voices heard in contention, with the facts that no one was discovered up stairs but the assassinated Mademoiselle L'Espanaye, and that there were no means of egress without notice of the party ascending. The wild disorder of the room; the corpse thrust, with the head downward, up the chimney; the frightful mutilation of the body of the old lady; these considerations, with those just mentioned, and others which I need not mention, have sufficed to paralyze the powers, by putting completely at fault the boasted *acumen*, of the government agents. They have fallen into the gross but common error of confounding the unusual with the abstruse. But it is by these deviations from the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels its way, if at all, in its search for the true. In investigations such as we are now

pursuing, it should not be so much asked 'what has occurred,' as 'what has occurred that has never occurred before.' In fact, the facility with which I shall arrive, or have arrived, at the solution of this mystery, is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police."

I stared at the speaker in mute astonishment.

"I am now awaiting," continued he, looking toward the door of our apartment—"I am now awaiting a person who, although perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration. Of the worst portion of the crimes committed, it is probable that he is innocent. I hope that I am right in the supposition; for upon it I build my expectation of reading the entire riddle. I look for the man here—in this room—every moment. It is true that he may not arrive; but the probability is that he will. Should he come, it will be necessary to detain him. Here are pistols; and we both know how to use them when occasion demands their use."

I took the pistols, scarcely knowing what I did, or believing what I heard, while Dupin went on, very much as if in a soliloquy. I have already spoken of his abstract manner at such times. His discourse was addressed to myself; but his voice, although by no means loud, had that intonation which is commonly employed in speaking to some one at a great distance. His eyes, vacant in expression, regarded only the wall.

"That the voices heard in contention," he said, "by the party upon the stairs, were not the voices of the women themselves, was fully proved by the evidence. This relieves us of all doubt upon the question whether the old lady could have first destroyed the daughter, and afterwards have committed suicide. I speak of this point chiefly for the sake of method; for the strength of Madame L'Espanaye would have been utterly unequal to the task of thrusting her daughter's corpse up the chimney as it was found; and the nature of the wounds upon her own person entirely preclude the idea of self-destruction. Murder, then, has been committed by some third party; and the voices of this third party were those heard in contention. Let me now advert—not to the whole testimony respecting these voices—but to what was peculiar in that testimony. Did you observe anything peculiar about it?"

I remarked that, while all the witnesses agreed in supposing the gruff voice to be that of a Frenchman, there was much disagreement in regard to the shrill, or, as one individual termed it, the harsh voice.

"That was the evidence itself," said Dupin, "but it was not the peculiarity of the evidence. You have observed nothing distinctive. Yet there was something to be observed. The witnesses, as you remark, agreed about the gruff voice; they were here unanimous. But in regard to the shrill voice, the peculiarity is—not that they disagreed—but that, while an Italian, an Englishman, a Spaniard, a Hollander, and a Frenchman attempted to describe it, each one spoke of it as that of a foreigner. Each is sure that it was not the voice of one of his own countrymen. Each likens it—not to the voice of an individual of any nation with whose language he is conversant—but the converse. The Frenchman supposes it the voice of a Spaniard, and 'might have distinguished some words had he been acquainted with the Spanish.' The Dutchman maintains it to have been that of a Frenchman; but we find it stated that 'not understanding French this witness was examined through an interpreter.' The Englishman thinks it the voice of a German, and 'does not understand German.' The Spaniard 'is sure' that it was that of an Englishman, but 'judges by the intonation' altogether, 'as he has no knowledge of the English.' The Italian believes it the voice of a Russian, but 'has never conversed with a native of Russia.' A second Frenchman differs, moreover, with the first, and is positive that the voice was that of an Italian; but, 'not being cognizant of that tongue, is, like the Spaniard, 'convinced by the intonation.' Now, how strangely unusual must that voice have really been, about which such testimony as this could have been elicited!—in whose *tones*, even, denizens of the five great divisions of Europe could recognize nothing familiar! You will say that it might have been the voice of an Asiatic—of an African. Neither Asiatics nor Africans abound in Paris; but, without denying the inference, I will now merely call your attention to three points. The voice is termed by one witness 'harsh rather than shrill.' It is represented by two others to have been 'quick and *unequal*.' No words—no sounds resembling words—were by any witnesses mentioned as distinguishable.

"I know not," continued Dupin, "what impression I may have made, so far, upon your own understanding; but I do not hesitate to say that legitimate deductions even from this portion of the testimony—the portion respecting the gruff and shrill voices—are in themselves sufficient to engender a suspicion which should give direction to all farther progress in the investigation of the mystery. I said 'legitimate deductions;' but my meaning is not thus fully expressed. I designed to imply that the deductions are the sole proper ones, and that the suspicion arises *inevitably* from them as the single result. What the suspicion is however, I will not say just yet. I merely wish you to bear in mind that, with myself, it was sufficiently forcible to give a definite form—a certain tendency—to my inquiries in the chamber.

"Let us now transport ourselves, in fancy, to this chamber. What shall we first seek here? The means of egress employed by the murderers. It is not too much to say that neither of us believe in praeternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially. Then how? Fortunately, there is but one mode of reasoning upon the point, and that mode must lead us to a definite decision. Let us examine, each by each, the possible means of egress. It is clear that the assassins were in the room where Mademoiselle L'Espanaye was found, or at least in the room adjoining, when the party ascended the stairs. It is then only from these two apartments that we have to seek issues. The police have laid bare the floors, the ceilings, and the masonry of the walls, in every direction. No secret issues could have escaped their vigilance. But, not trusting to their eyes, I examined with my own. There were, then, no secret issues. Both doors leading from the rooms into the passage were securely locked, with keys inside. Let us turn to the chimneys. These, although of ordinary width for some eight or ten feet above the hearths, will not admit, throughout their extent, the body of a large cat. The impossibility of egress by means already stated, being thus absolute, we are reduced to the windows. Through those of the front room no one could have escaped without notice from the crowd in the street. The murderers must have passed, then, through those of the back room. Now, brought to this conclusion in so unequivocal a manner as we are, it is not our part, as reasoners, to reject it on account of apparent impossibilities. It is only left for us to prove that these apparent 'impossibilities' are, in reality, not such.

"There are two windows in the chamber. One of them is unobstructed by furniture, and is wholly visible. The lower portion of the other is hidden from view by the head of the unwieldy bedstead which is thrust close up against it. The former was found securely fastened from within. It resisted the utmost force of those who endeavored to raise it. A large gimlet-hole had been pierced in its frame to the left, and a very stout nail was found fitted therein, nearly to the head. Upon examining the other window, a similar nail was seen similarly fitted into it; and a vigorous attempt to raise this sash, failed also. The police are now entirely satisfied that egress had not been in these directions. And, *therefore*, it was thought a matter of superogation to withdraw the nails and open the windows.

"My own examination was somewhat more particular, and was so for the reason I have just given—because here it was, I knew, that all apparent impossibilities must be proved to be not such in reality.

"I proceeded to think thus—*a posteriori*. The murderers *did* escape from one of these windows. This being so, they could not have refastened the sashes from the inside, as they were found fastened—the consideration which put a stop, through its obviousness, to the scrutiny of the police in this quarter. Yet the sashes *were* fastened. They must, then, have the power of fastening themselves. There was no escape from this conclusion. I stepped to the unobstructed casement, withdrew the nail with some difficulty, and attempted to raise the sash. It resisted all my efforts, as I had anticipated. A concealed spring must, I now knew, exist; and this corroboration of my idea convinced me that my premises, at least, were correct, however mysterious still appeared the circumstances attending the nails. A careful search soon brought to light the hidden spring. I pressed it, and, satisfied with the discovery, forebore to upraise the sash.

"I now replaced the nail and regulated it attentively. A person passing out through this window might have reclosed it, and the spring would have caught—but the nail could not have been replaced. The conclusion was plain, and again narrowed in the field of my investigations. The assassins *must* have escaped through the other window. Supposing, then, the springs upon each sash to be the same, as was probable, there *must* be found a difference between the nails, or at least between the modes of their fixture. Getting upon the sacking of the bedstead, I looked over the headboard minutely at the second casement. Passing my hand down behind the board, I readily discovered and pressed the spring, which was, as I had supposed, identical in character with its neighbor. I now looked at the nail. It was as stout as the other, and apparently fitted in the same manner—driven in nearly up to the head.

"You will say that I was puzzled; but, if you think so, you must have misunderstood the nature of the inductions. To use a sporting phrase, I had not been once 'at fault.' The scent had never for an instant been lost. There was no flaw in any link of the chain. I had traced the secret to its ultimate result—and that result was the *nail*. It had, I say, in

every respect the appearance of its fellow in the other window; but this fact was an absolute nullity (conclusive as it might seem to be) when compared with the consideration that here, at this point, terminated the clew. 'There must be something wrong,' I said, 'about the nail.' I touched it; and the head, with about a quarter of an inch of the shank, came off in my fingers. The rest of the shank was in the gimlet-hole, where it had been broken off. The fracture was an old one (for its edges were incrusted with rust), and had apparently been accomplished by the blow of a hammer, which had partially imbedded, in the top of the bottom sash, the head portion of the nail. I now carefully replaced this head portion in the indentation whence I had taken it, and the resemblance to a perfect nail was complete—the fissure was invisible. Pressing the spring, I gently raised the sash for a few inches; the head went up with it, remaining firm in its bed. I closed the window, and the semblance of the whole nail was again perfect.

"The riddle, so far, was now unriddled. The assassin had escaped through the window which looked upon the bed. Dropping of its own accord upon his exit (or perhaps purposely closed), it had become fastened by the spring and it was the retention of this spring which had been mistaken by the police for that of the nail—farther inquiry being thus considered unnecessary.

"The next question is that of the mode of descent. Upon this point I had been satisfied in my walk with you around the building. About five feet and a half from the casement in question there runs a lightning-rod. From this rod it would have been impossible for anyone to reach the window itself, to say nothing of entering it. I observed, however, that the shutters of the fourth story were of the peculiar kind called by Parisian carpenters *ferrades*—a kind rarely employed at the present day, but frequently seen upon very old mansions at Lyons and Bordeaux. They are in the form of an ordinary door, (a single, not a folding door) except that the upper half is latticed or worked in open trellis—thus affording an excellent hold for the hands. In the present instance these shutters are fully three feet and a half broad. When we saw them from the rear of the house, they were both about half open—that is to say, they stood off at right angles from the wall. It is probable that the police, as well as myself, examined the back of the tenement; but, if so, in looking at these *ferrades* in the line of their breadth (as they must have done), they did not perceive this great breadth itself, or, at all events, failed to take it into due consideration. In fact, having once satisfied themselves that no egress could have been made in this quarter, they would naturally bestow here a very cursory examination. It was clear to me, however, that the shutter belonging to the window at the head of the bed, would, if swung fully back to the wall, reach to within two feet of the lightning-rod. It was also evident that, by exertion of a very unusual degree of activity and courage, an entrance into the window, from the rod, might have been thus effected. By reaching to the distance of two feet and a half (we now suppose the shutter open to its whole extent) a robber might have taken a firm grasp upon the trellis-work. Letting go, then, his hold upon the rod, placing his feet securely against the wall, and springing boldly from it, he might have swung the shutter so as to close it, and, if we imagine the window open at the time, might even have swung himself into the room.

"I wish you to bear especially in mind that I have spoken of a very unusual degree of activity as requisite to success in so hazardous and so difficult a feat. It is my design to show you, first, that the thing might possibly have been accomplished—but, secondly and *chiefly*, I wish to impress upon your understanding the very *extraordinary*—the almost praeternatural character of the agility which could have accomplished it.

"You will say, no doubt, using the language of the law, that 'to make out my case' I should rather undervalue than insist upon a full estimation of the activity required in this matter. This may be the practice in law, but it is not the usage of reason. My ultimate object is only the truth. My immediate purpose is to lead you to place in juxta-position that *very unusual* activity of which I have just spoken, with that *very peculiar* shrill (or harsh) and *unequal* voice, about whose nationality no two persons could be found to agree, and in whose utterance no syllabification could be detected."

At these words a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin flitted over my mind. I seemed to be upon the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend—as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. My friend went on with his discourse.

"You will see," he said, "that I have shifted the question from the mode of egress to that of ingress. It was my design to suggest that both were effected in the same manner, at the same point. Let us now revert to the interior of the room. Let us survey the appearances here. The drawers of the bureau, it is said, had been rifled, although many articles of apparel still remained within them. The conclusion here is absurd. It is a mere guess—a very silly one—and no more. How are we to know that the articles found in the drawers were not all these drawers had originally contained? Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter lived an exceedingly retired life—saw no company—seldom went out—had little use for numerous change of habiliment. Those found were at least of as good quality as any likely to be possessed by these ladies. If a thief had taken any, why did he not take the best—why did he not take all? In a word, why did he abandon four thousand francs in gold to encumber himself with a bundle of linen? The gold was abandoned. Nearly the whole sum mentioned by Monsieur Mignaud, the banker, was discovered, in bags, upon the floor. I wish you, therefore, to discard from your thoughts the blundering idea of *motive*, engendered in the brains of the police by that portion of the evidence which speaks of money delivered at the door of the house. Coincidences ten times as remarkable as this (the delivery of the money, and murder committed within three days upon the party receiving it), happen to all of us every hour of our lives, without attracting even momentary notice. Coincidences, in general, are great stumbling-blocks in the way of that class of thinkers who have been educated to know nothing of the theory of probabilities—that theory to which the most glorious objects of human research are indebted for the most glorious of illustration. In the present instance, had the gold been gone, the fact of its delivery three days before would have formed something more than a coincidence. It would have been corroborative of this idea of motive. But, under the real circumstances of the case, if we are to suppose gold the motive of this outrage, we must also imagine the perpetrator so vacillating an idiot as to have abandoned his gold and his motive together.

"Keeping now steadily in mind the points to which I have drawn your attention—that peculiar voice, that unusual agility, and that startling absence of motive in a murder so singularly atrocious as this—let us glance at the butchery itself. Here is a woman strangled to death by manual strength, and thrust up a chimney, head downward. Ordinarily assassins employ no such modes of murder as this. Least of all, do they thus dispose of the murdered. In the manner of thrusting the corpse up the chimney, you will admit that there was something excessively *outre*—something altogether irreconcilable with our common notions of human action, even when we suppose the actors the most depraved of men. Think, too, how great must have been that strength which could have thrust the body up such an aperture so forcibly that the united vigor of several persons was found barely sufficient to drag it down!

"Turn now to other indications of the employment of a vigor most marvelous. On the hearth were thick tresses—very thick tresses—of grey human hair. These had been torn out by the roots. You are aware of the great force necessary in tearing thus from the head even twenty or thirty hairs together. You saw the locks in question as well as myself. Their roots (a hideous sight!) were clotted with fragments of the flesh of the scalp—sure token of the prodigious power which had been exerted in uprooting perhaps half a million hairs at a time. The throat of the old lady was not merely cut, but the head absolutely severed from the body—the instrument was a mere razor. I wish you also to look at the brutal ferocity of these deeds. Of the bruises upon the body of Madame L'Espanaye I do not speak. Monsieur Dumas, and his worthy coadjutor Monsieur Etienne, have pronounced that they were inflicted by some obtuse instrument; and so far these gentlemen are very correct. The obtuse instrument was clearly the stone pavement in the yard, upon which the victim had fallen from the window which looked in upon the bed. This idea, however simple it may now seem, escaped the police for the same reason that the breadth of the shutters escaped them—because, by the affair of the nails, their perceptions have been hermetically sealed against the possibility of the windows having ever been opened at all.

"If now, in addition to all these things, you have properly reflected upon the odd disorder of the chamber, we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?"

I felt a creeping of the flesh as Dupin asked me the question. "A madman," I said, "has done this deed—some raving maniac, escaped from a neighboring *Maison de Sante*."

"In some respects," he replied, "your idea is not irrelevant. But the voices of madmen, even in their wildest paroxysms, are never found to tally with that peculiar voice heard upon the stairs. Madmen are of some nation, and their language, however incoherent in its words, has always the coherence of syllabifi-

cation. Besides, the hair of a madman is not such as I now hold in my hand. I disentangled this little tuft from the rigidly clutched fingers of Madame L'Espanaye. Tell me what you can make of it."

"Dupin!" I said, completely unnerved; "this hair is most unusual—this is no *human* hair."

"I have not asserted that it is," said he; "but before we decide this point, I wish you to glance at the little sketch I have here traced upon this paper. It is a *fac-simile* drawing of what has been described in one portion of the testimony as 'dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails,' upon the throat of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye, and in another, (by Messrs. Dumas and Etienne,) as a 'series of livid spots, evidently the impression of fingers.'

"You will perceive," continued my friend, spreading out the paper upon the table before us, "that this drawing gives the idea of a firm and fixed hold. There is no *slipping* apparent. Each finger has retained—possibly until the death of the victim—the fearful grasp by which it orginally imbedded itself. Attempt, now, to place all your fingers, at the same time, in the respective impressions as you see them."

I made the attempt in vain.

"We are possibly not giving this matter a fair trial," he said. "The paper is spread out upon a plane surface; but the human throat is cylindrical. Here is a billet of wood, the circumference of which is about that of the throat. Wrap the drawing around it, and try the experiment again."

I did so; but the difficulty was even more obvious than before.

"This," I said, "is the mark of no human hand."

"Read now," replied Dupin, "this passage from Cuvier."

It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands. The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once.

"The description of the digits," said I, as I made an end of reading, "is in exact accordance with this drawing. I see that no animal but an Ourang-Outang, of the species here mentioned, could have impressed the indentations as you have traced them. This tuft of tawny hair, too, is identical in character with that of the beast of Cuvier. But I cannot possibly comprehend the particulars of this frightful mystery. Besides, there were two voices heard in contention, and one of them was unquestionably the voice of a Frenchman."

"True; and you will remember an expression attributed almost unanimously, by the evidence, to this voice—the expression, 'mon Dieu!' This, under the circumstances, has been justly characterized by one of the witnesses (Montani, the confectioner) as an expression of remonstrance or expostulation. Upon these two words, therefore, I have mainly built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle. A Frenchman was cognizant of the murder. It is possible—indeed it is far more than probable—that he was innocent of all participation in the bloody transactions which took place. The Ourang-Outang may have escaped from him. He may have traced it to the chamber; but, under the agitating circumstances which ensued, he could never have re-captured it. It is still at large. I will not pursue these guesses—for I have no right to call them more—since the shades of reflection upon which they are based are scarcely of sufficient depth to be appreciable by my own intellect, and since I could not pretend to make them intelligible to the understanding of another. We will call them guesses then, and speak of them as such. If the Frenchman in question is indeed, as I suppose, innocent, of this atrocity, this advertisement, which I left last night, upon our return home, at the office of 'Le Monde,' (a paper devoted to the shipping interest, and much sought by sailors,) will bring him to our residence."

He handed me a paper, and I read thus:

> CAUGHT—*In the Bois de Boulogne, early in the morning of the —— inst.,* (the morning of the murder), *a very large, tawny Ourang-Outang of the Bornese species. The owner, who is ascertained to be a sailor, belonging to a Maltese vessel, may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily and paying a few charges arising from its capture and keeping. Call at No. ——, Rue——, Faubourg St. Germain—au troisieme.*

"How was it possible," I asked, "that you should know the man to be a sailor, and belonging to a Maltese vessel?"

"I do not know it," said Dupin. "I am not sure of it. Here, however, is a small piece of ribbon, which from its form, and from its greasy appearance, has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long queues of which sailors are so fond. Moreover, this knot is one which few besides sailors can tie, and is peculiar to the Maltese. I picked the ribbon up at the foot of the lightning-rod. It could not have belonged to either of the deceased. Now if, after all, I am wrong in my induction from this ribbon, that the Frenchman was a sailor belonging to a Maltese vessel, still I can have done no harm in saying what I did in the advertisement. If I am in error, he will merely suppose that I have been misled by some circumstance into which he will not take the trouble to inquire. But if I am right, a great point is gained. Cognizant although innocent of the murder, the Frenchman will naturally hesitate about replying to to the advertisement—about demanding the Ourang-Outang. He will reason thus:—'I am innocent; I am poor; my Ourang-Outang is of great value—to one in my circumstances a fortune of itself—why should I lose it through idle apprehensions of danger? Here it is, within my grasp. It was found in the Bois de Boulogne—at a vast distance from the scene of that butchery. How can it ever be suspected that a brute beast should have done the deed? The police are at fault—they have failed to procure the slightest clew. Should they even trace the animal, it would be impossible to prove me cognizant of the murder, or to implicate me in guilt on account of that cognizance. Above all, I am known. The advertiser designates me as the possessor of the beast. I am not sure to what limit his knowledge may extend. Should I avoid claiming a property of so great value, which it is known that I possess, I will render the animal, at least, liable to suspicion. It is not my policy to attract attention either to myself or to the beast. I will answer the advertisement, get the Ourang-Outang, and keep it close until this matter has blown over.'"

At this moment we heard a step upon the stairs.

"Be ready," said Dupin, " with your pistols, but neither use them nor show them until at a signal from myself."

The front door of the house had been left open, and the visitor had entered, without ringing, and advanced several steps upon the staircase. Now, however, he seemed to hesitate. Presently we heard him descending. Dupin was moving quickly to the door, when we again heard him coming up. He did not turn back a second time, but stepped up with decision and rapped at the door of our chamber.

"Come in," said Dupin, in a cheerful and hearty tone.

A man entered. He was a sailor, evidently,—a tall, stout, and muscular-looking person, with a certain dare-devil expression of countenance, not altogether unprepossessing. His face, greatly sunburnt, was more than half hidden by whisker and *mustachio*. He had with him a huge oaken cudgel, but appeared to be otherwise unarmed. He bowed awkwardly, and bade us "good evening," in French accents, which, although somewhat Neufchatelish, were still sufficiently indicative of a Parisian origin.

"Sit down, my friend," said Dupin. "I suppose you have called about the Ourang-Outang. Upon my word, I almost envy you the possession of him; a remarkably fine, and no doubt a very valuable animal. How old do you suppose him to be?"

The sailor drew a long breath, with the air of a man relieved of some intolerable burden, and then replied, in an assured tone:

"I have no way of telling—but he can't be more than four or five years old. Have you got him here?"

"Oh no; we had no conveniences for keeping him here. He is at a livery stable in the Rue Dubourg, just by. You can get him in the morning. Of course you are prepared to identify the property?"

"To be sure I am, sir."

"I shall be sorry to part with him," said Dupin.

"I don't mean that you should be at all this trouble for nothing, sir," said the man. "Couldn't expect it. Am very willing to pay a reward for the finding of the animal—that is to say, anything in reason."

"Well," replied my friend, "that is all very fair, to be sure. Let me think!—what should I have? Oh! I will tell you. My reward shall be this. You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue."

Dupin said the last words in a very low tone, and very quietly. Just as quietly, too, he walked toward the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. He then drew a pistol from his bosom and placed it, without the least flurry, upon the table.

The sailor's face flushed up as if he were struggling with suffocation. He started to his feet and grasped his cudgel; but the next moment he fell back into his seat, trembling violently, and with the countenance of death itself. He spoke not a word. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

"My friend," said Dupin, in a kind tone, "you are alarming yourself unnecessarily—you are indeed. We mean you no harm whatever. I pledge you the honor of a gentleman, and of a Frenchman, that we intend you no injury. I perfectly well know that you are innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue. It will not do, however, to deny that you are in some measure implicated in them. From what I have already said, you must know that I have had means of information about this matter—means of which you could never have dreamed. Now the thing stands thus. You

have done nothing which you could have avoided—nothing, certainly, which renders you culpable. You were not even guilty of robbery, when you might have robbed with impunity. You have nothing to conceal. You have no reason for concealment. On the other hand, you are bound by every principle of honor to confess all you know. An innocent man is now imprisoned, charged with that crime of which you can point out the perpetrator."

The sailor had recovered his presence of mind, in a great measure, while Dupin uttered these words; but his original boldness of bearing was all gone.

"So help me God," said he, after a brief pause, "I will tell you all I know about this affair;—but I do not expect you to believe one half I say—I would be a fool indeed if I did. Still, I am innocent, and I will make a clean breast if I die for it."

What he stated was, in substance, this. He had lately made a voyage to the Indian Archipelago. A party, of which he formed one, landed at Borneo, and passed into the interior on an excursion of pleasure. Himself and a companion had captured the Ourang-Outang. This companion dying, the animal fell into his own exclusive possession. After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of his captive during the home voyage, he at length succeeded in lodging it safely at his own residence in Paris, where, not to attract toward himself the unpleasant curiosity of his neighbors, he kept it carefully secluded, until such time as it should recover from a wound in the foot, received from a splinter on board ship. His ultimate design was to sell it.

Returning home from some sailor's frolic on the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room, into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined. Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. Terrified at the sight of so dangerous a weapon in the possession of an animal so ferocious, and so well able to use it, the man, for some moments, was at a loss what to do. He had been accustomed, however, to quiet the creature, even in its fiercest moods, by the use of a whip, and to this he now resorted. Upon sight of it, the Ourang-Outang sprang at once through the door of the chamber, down the stairs, and thence, through a window, unfortunately open, into the street.

The Frenchman followed in despair; the ape, razor still in hand, occasionally stopping to look back and gesticulate at its pursuer, until the latter had nearly come up with it. It then again made off. In this manner the chase continued for a long time. The streets were profoundly quiet, as it was nearly three o'clock in the morning. In passing down an alley in the rear of the Rue Morgue, the fugitive's attention was arrested by a light gleaming from the open window of Madame L'Espanaye's chamber, in the fourth story of her house. Rushing to the building, it perceived the lightning-rod, clambered up with inconceivable agility, grasped the shutter, which was thrown fully back against the wall, and, by its means, swung itself directly upon the headboard of the bed. The whole feat did not occupy a minute. The shutter was kicked open again by the Ourang-Outang as it entered the room.

The sailor, in the meantime, was both rejoiced and perplexed. He had strong hopes of now recapturing the brute, as it could scarcely escape from the trap into which it had ventured, except by the rod, where it might be intercepted as it came down. On the other hand, there was much cause for anxiety as to what it might do in the house. This latter reflection urged the man still to follow the fugitive. A lightning-rod is ascended without difficulty, especially by a sailor; but, when he had arrived as high as the window, which lay far to his left, his career was stopped; the most that he could accomplish was to reach over so as to obtain a glimpse of the interior of the room. At this glimpse he nearly fell from his hold through excess of horror. Now it was that those hideous shrieks arose upon the night, which had startled from slumber the inmates of the Rue Morgue. Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, habited in their night clothes, had apparently been arranging some papers in the iron chest already mentioned, which had been wheeled into the middle of the room. It was open, and its contents lay beside it on the floor. The victims must have been sitting with their backs toward the window; and, from the time elapsing between the ingress of the beast and the screams, it seems probable that it was not immediately perceived. The flapping-to of the shutter would naturally have been attributed to the wind.

As the sailor looked in, the gigantic animal had seized Madame L'Espanaye by the hair, (which was loose, as she had been combing it,) and was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. The daughter lay prostrate and motionless; she had swooned. The screams and struggles of the old lady (during which the hair was torn from her head) had the effect of changing the probably pacific purposes of the Ourang-Outang into those of wrath. With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body. The sight of blood inflamed its anger into frenzy. Gnashing its teeth, and flashing fire from its eyes, it flew upon the body of the girl, and imbedded its fearful talons in her throat, retaining its grasp until she expired. Its wandering and wild glances fell at this moment upon the head of the bed, over which the face of its master, rigid with horror, was just discernible. The fury of the beast, who no doubt bore still in mind the dreaded whip, was instantly converted into fear. Conscious of having deserved punishment, it seemed desirous of concealing its bloody deeds, and skipped about the chamber in an agony of nervous agitation; throwing down and breaking the furniture as it moved, and dragging the bed from the bedstead. In conclusion, it seized first the corpse of the daughter, and thrust it up the chimney, as it was found; then that of the old lady, which it immediately hurled through the window headlong.

As the ape approached the casement with its mutilated burden, the sailor shrank aghast to the rod, and, rather gliding than clambering down it, hurried at once home—dreading the consequences of the butchery, and gladly abandoning, in his terror, all solicitude about the fate of the Ourang-Outang. The words heard by the party upon the staircase were the Frenchman's exclamations of horror and affright, commingled with the fiendish jabberings of the brute.

I have scarcely anything to add. The Ourang-Outang must have escaped from the chamber, by the rod, just before the breaking of the door. It must have closed the window as it passed through it. It was subsequently caught by the owner himself, who obtained for it a very large sum at the *Jardin des Plantes*. Le Bon was instantly released, upon our narration of the circumstances (with some comments from Dupin) at the *bureau* of the Prefect of Police. This functionary, however well disposed to my friend, could not altogether conceal his chagrin at the turn which affairs had taken, and was fain to indulge in a sarcasm or two, about the propriety of every person minding his own business.

"Let them talk," said Dupin, who had not thought it necessary to reply. "Let him discourse; it will ease his conscience. I am satisfied with having defeated him in his own castle. Nevertheless, that he failed in the solution of this mystery, is by no means that matter for wonder which he supposes it; for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no *stamen*. It is all head and no body, like the picture of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature, after all. I like him especially for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained his reputation for ingenuity. I mean the way he has *'de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.'*"

*Rousseau, Nouvelle Heloise.

Kilted Wraith and Bagpipe Spook Communicate With Spiritualists

A MOST colorful procession of spirits passed before the recent convention of the Illinois Spiritualist Association. There was a Highland gentleman with kilts of Stewart tartan who came to give a message to "Mary," and who was accompanied by an uncle who played the bagpipe. "Eleanor Ives," a little girl of four, returned to tell her mother that all was well in the world beyond. At first, she said, she had hated to go, but now she is happy and often visits her mother. Lastly, a colored "mammy" was materialized by Mrs. Waite, the medium. She was seen sitting before a cabin door smoking an old corncob pipe. She said she had a message for her granddaughter.

Here's the Final, Thrilling Installment of

THE MOON TERROR

By A. G. BIRCH

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST INSTALLMENT

THE EARTH is rocked to its foundation, and the end of the world is threatened, by a mysterious, unseen power known only as "KWO." At regular intervals, gigantic earthquakes and tidal waves visit the earth, destroying great cities and spreading terror. Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, American astronomer, attributes all this to the Seuen-H'Sin, a Chinese sect with which he is familiar. Finally, when the life of the world seems doomed, he gains permission from the U. S. Navy Department to proceed in the destroyer, Albatross, to the lair of "KWO" and do everything possible to stop the world-wide havoc. Accompanied by his friend, Arthur (who tells the story), the astronomer sails to a lonely spot in the frozen North, where they discover the diabolical power plant of "KWO." It has developed, meanwhile, that "KWO" and his sorcerers are moon worshipers and are endeavoring to create a second moon by splitting the earth in two. In the Moon God's Temple Dr. Gresham and his friend, disguised as Chinese, witness the weird rites of the sect, in which a human being is sacrificed, and then their identity is discovered. Attacked, they flee back toward their ship, but the earth seems suddenly to open, and Arthur is swallowed in a black pit.

CHAPTER NINE STARTS FROM THIS POINT

CHAPTER IX

IN THE SORCERERS' POWER

WHAT happened immediately after that first drop into the abyss I do not know. My only recollection is of hurtling down a steep incline amid a smothering avalanche of dirt, of striking heavily upon a rocky ledge, and of bounding off again into the inky void as my senses left me.

The next thing I knew was the slow dawn of a sensation of cold; and then my eyes fluttered open and I beheld the moon shining upon me through a rent in the surrounding blackness. At first I was too dazed to comprehend anything that had occurred, but soon, with considerable pain, I raised myself upon one elbow and looked about, whereupon understanding gradually returned.

The place where I lay was a mud-covered ledge upon one of the steep, sloping walls of a huge chasm that had opened in the earth. The gash was probably seventy-five feet across at this point, and above me the walls soared perhaps a hundred feet. Within arm's reach the shelf that supported me broke off in a precipice. I was half imbedded in soft mud, and was soaked to the skin and nearly frozen.

How long I had lain there I could not tell, but I judged it had not been more that two or three hours, for the moon still was high in the heavens.

All at once, as I gazed upon the weird scene, my heart leaped with anguish at remembrance of my vanished comrade, Dr. Ferdinand Gresham. He had dropped before me into the chasm, and therefore must have fallen clear of the ledge and plunged into the depths!

Thrusting myself to the edge of the precipice, I peered below. Nothing rewarded my gaze except horrifying silence and vapory gloom. The pain of the movement was so intense that I fell back almost in a swoon.

Before long, however, I saw that the moon was drawing near the rim of the gorge and that I would soon be engulfed in utter darkness, so I turned my eyes up the jagged wall in search of some means of escape. After considerable study, I thought I could discern a way to the summit.

But just then another surprise caught my gaze: the strip of sky above the chasm appeared narrower than when I had first turned my eyes upward. For a few moments I attributed this to an optical illusion produced by some swiftly-moving clouds overhead; but all at once the hideous truth burst upon me—*the crack in the earth was drawing shut!*

Heedless of the pain, I flung myself against the cliff—climbing in utter panic, for fear the chasm would close completely before I could get out.

The ascent was difficult and perilous in the extreme. Often rocks loosened beneath my fingers, starting miniature avalanches, and I flattened myself against the wall in a paroxysm of terror and clung there until the danger passed.

For a space that seemed hours long I continued to claw my way upward—with the prodigious trap closing steadily upon me. At times I found myself below unscalable surfaces, and was obliged to descend a bit and start over again in a new direction; and often it seemed as if the pain of my injuries would cause me to faint.

When I had come within thirty feet of the top, the climb developed into a veritable race with death, for the opposite wall was now almost upon me.

And then, suddenly, I found the way blocked by a sheer, unscalable wall, upon which only a fly could have found a foothold! Simultaneously I saw that the moon was right at the rim of the chasm, and that in a minute the light would vanish.

With the realization of my plight, panic seized me, and I beat my head against the wall and shrieked aloud.

And, though I could not guess it then, that very outcry of despair was to save my life.

Hardly had my first shriek gone forth before a head appeared directly above me, and a voice rang out:

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* *The first half of this story was published in the May issue of WEIRD TALES. A copy will be mailed by the publishers for twenty-five cents.*

"Here he is, fellows! Quick with that rope!"

With leaping heart, I recognized the voice as Dr. Gresham's!

An instant later a rope with a loop in the end of it dangled beside me, and a number of hands reached out to pull me to safety. Another moment, and I was drawn over the brink—not one second too soon, for as I made the last dozen feet the closing walls of the pit brushed my body.

Exhausted and trembling, I sank upon the ground, while a number of figures crowded about me. These proved to be twenty-five men from the *Albatross*, under command of Ensign Wiles Hallock. They were all dressed in the dark blue garments of the sorcerers. How they came to be there was briefly related by Dr. Gresham.

When the ground had opened beneath us earlier in the evening, the astronomer had clutched the roots of a tree, and within a few seconds after I had dropped from sight he was back on firm ground. The Chinamen who had been pursuing us had either fallen into the gash or had fled in terror.

Considerable vapor was rising from the pit, but the scientist noticed that this was clearing rapidly, so he decided to linger at the spot awhile, with the forlorn hope that I might be found. Soon the vapor vanished and, as the moonlight was shining directly into the crack, the doctor began a search.

After a time he discerned a figure lying upon a ledge below. Close scrutiny revealed that the dark costume characteristic of the Seuen-H'sin was torn, displaying an orange garment beneath.

Confident that none of the sorcerers would be wearing two suits at once in this fashion, the scientist concluded the figure was mine. For a time he doubted whether I lived, but eventually he thought he saw me stir feebly, whereupon he began frantic efforts to reach me.

Repeated attempts to descend the precipice failed. Then he tried dropping pebbles to arouse me. Again unsuccessful, he risked attracting the sorcerers back to the spot by shouting into the chasm.

All his efforts proved futile, so he finally returned to the destroyer and obtained this rescue party.

In grateful silence I gripped his hand.

"Now," the astronomer concluded, "if you are able to walk, we will get back to the ship. It is only 1 o'clock, and if we hurry there still is time to attack the Seuen-H'sin before daylight. Conditions throughout the world are so alarming that we must put this power plant out of business without delay!"

"Go ahead!" I assented. "I'm able to hobble along!"

It was less than two miles to the destroyer's anchorage, they said. During the march none of the sorcerers was sighted, with which we began to conclude that the cracking of the earth had affected the village on the other side of the mountain so that all their lookouts had been called in.

But suddenly, when we were less than half a mile from the vessel, the stillness of the night was shattered by the shrill blast of a whistle. A series of other wild shrieks from the steam chant came in quick succession.

"The *Albatross!*" exclaimed Ensign Hallock. "Something's happening!"

We burst into a run—the whistle still screaming through the night.

All at once the sound ceased, and as the echoes died out among the hills we heard the rattle of firearms.

"An attack!" cried Hallock. "The sorcerers have attacked the ship!"

Then, abruptly, the firing, too, died out.

A few moments later we emerged from the ravine onto the bank of the fiord and into full view of the destroyer. The passing of the moon into the west had brought the vessel within its rays—and the sight that greeted us almost froze our blood!

Swarming about the deck were dozens of Chinamen—some with rifles, some with knives. They appeared to be completely in control of the ship. Numerous pairs of them were coming up from below decks, carrying the bodies of the vessel's crew, which they carelessly tossed overboard. Evidently they had taken our companions by surprise and wiped them out!

At this sight Ensign Hallock and his men became frenzied with rage.

"Ready, men!" the officer announced to his followers. "We're going down there and give those murderers something to remember!"

Eagerly the seamen prepared to charge the ship. But Dr. Gresham stopped them.

"It's no use," he said. "There are hundreds of the sorcerers down there—and only a handful of us. You would only be throwing away your lives and defeating the whole purpose of this expedition. We must find a better way."

The astronomer's counsel prevailed. Whereupon we debated what should be done. The situation was desperate. Here we were, completely isolated in a grim wilderness, hundreds of miles from help, and surrounded by hordes of savage fanatics. Soon, no doubt, the sorcerers' spies would find us. And, meanwhile, we were helpless to put an end to the terrors that were engulfing the planet and its inhabitants.

So despair gradually took possession of us. Not even the customary resourcefulness of Dr. Gresham rose to the emergency.

Suddenly Ensign Hallock gave an exclamation of excitement.

"*The Nippon!*" he burst out. "Let's turn the tables on the Chinese, and seize the *Nippon!* She's probably got a guard on board, but maybe we can take it by surprise!"

"What could we do with her?" I objected. "She needs a large crew—and there are only twenty-seven of us!"

"We'll sail her away, of course!" replied the young naval officer with enthusiasm. "There must be fuel on board, for her fires are going. Three of the boys here are apprentice engineers. I can do the navigating. And the rest of you can take turns stoking the boilers!"

"But how could we slip past the *Albatross?*" asked Dr. Gresham.

Ensign Hallock seemed to have thought of that, too, for he promptly answered:

"The *Albatross* is an oil-burning craft, with the new type of burners that came into use since these Chinks have been stowed away here in the wilderness. The mechanism for using the oil is quite complicated, and the sorcerers are likely to have trouble operating her until they figure out the system. If we reach them before they have time to master the thing, they will be helpless to stop us!"

The young man's enthusiasm was contagious. Dr. Gresham began to give heed.

"Even if we fail to get away in the *Nippon,*" the scientist admitted, "she has a powerful wireless outfit: Kwo-Sung-tao has been using it to communicate with Washington. With that radio in our hands for ten minutes, we can summon help sufficient to annihilate these yellow devils!"

The plan was adopted without further question. And, believing that the sorcerers' easy victory over the *Albatross* had made them careless, perhaps, we struck out in as direct a course as possible for the spot at which the *Nippon* was docked.

In twenty minutes, without sighting any of the enemy, we arrived at the edge of the timber behind the wharf.

CHAPTER X

WE TAKE DESPERATE CHANCES

THE GREAT LINER lay silent in the moonlight, with no lights visible about her, but thin columns of smoke rose lazily from her funnels. A gangplank was down.

It was decided that our number should divide into three equal parts. One was to go to the bow and board the craft there by climbing up the line fastening the ship to the pier; this line was in the shadow except at its far end, where the men would emerge upon the deck. The second group was to get aboard at the stern by the same means. And the third detachment was to advance by the gangplank.

The plan worked without a hitch, and soon we were assembled upon the vessel's main deck. No guard was in sight. Hurriedly, we explored the upper decks and all the chambers off them: They were empty.

Then, descending simultaneously by companionways forward, aft and amidship, we began to search the body of the vessel. Still no one could be found.

And this deserted condition of the ship continued until only the stokehold remained to be entered. Here, however, we were certain of finding people.

Leaving three men on deck to guard against surprise, the rest of us crept into the boiler room.

Only two Chinamen were in the place, leisurely engaged in stoking the furnaces. We had them covered with our revolvers before they had any warning of our approach.

In spite of the odds against them, one of the Mongolians leaped forward and had almost struck one of our men with his shovel before a shot killed him in his tracks. The other Chinaman submitted, and he at once was securely bound and dumped into a corner.

Dr. Gresham tried to question the prisoner in Chinese, but all the information he could get regarding the keeping up of steam on the *Nippon* was: "Maybe leave here soon!"

While the astronomer had been thus engaged, Ensign Hallock and some of his men were examining the coal bunkers, and they now reported that the vessel was stocked with fuel for a long voyage.

At this juncture, one of the deck watch came to announce that the moon was sinking near the mountaintops, and that if we hoped to get far down the channel before the light failed we would have to start promptly.

Detailing eighteen men to do the firing—with orders to get more steam as rapidly as possible—Ensign Hallock and the rest of rushed to the engine room, where the three apprentice engineers already were at work. Finding everything all right there, the officer proceeded to the steering room, while some of us pulled in the gangplank.

The astronomer and myself next started to find the radio plant, to get into communication with the Mare Island navy yard. But here we encountered a set-back: The wireless plant had been removed! Kwo-Sung-tao, we could only surmise, had moved the set to a spot more convenient to the village. So, for the present, communication with the outside world was impossible.

During this brief period of putting the ship in sailing order, none of the sorcerers made an appearance; probably all the men they could spare were exploring the captured destroyer.

Soon steam was up; whereupon Ensing Hallock sent Dr. Gresham to the bow and myself to the stern to keep a close lookout, and himself ascended to the bridge and gave the order to start the engines and cast off. Before many moments the leviathan was moving away from the wharf.

The officer had found from the charts that there was a place only half a mile or so upstream where the fiord opened into a bay, or amphitheater. There, from all indications, room might be had to turn the ship around and head her down the channel. For this opening he now set his course.

Although we maintained a very slow speed, it was not long before we nosed our way into the bay. Here the walls of the fiord retreated far enough to form a considerable body of water; nevertheless, it was plain we would have close work turning the *Nippon* in such a space. It would be necessary to steam well over against the north bank, where there no longer was any moonlight and the shore line was swallowed up in inky blackness.

Redoubling the vigilance of our lookout, we began the maneuver. Slowly, Ensign Hallock swung the huge ship around. Twice it was necessary to stop and reverse the engines, accomplishing part of the turn by backing. In doing so, we had a narrow escape from running into a rocky promontory in the dark.

But at last the liner's head was fairly about and the way seemed clear for our dash down the channel past the *Albatross*. As the officer signaled for more speed, all of us unconsciously steeled ourselves for the climax of our adventure.

But at that instant a deep-toned bell, sounding like the tocsin upon the Temple of the Moon God, began tolling in the distance. This was followed almost immediately by a series of sharp blasts from the whistle of the destroyer.

Now that we had completed the dangerous turn, my duties in the stern were finished, so I ran forward, joining Dr. Gresham, and together we climbed to the bridge.

"The Chinks must have discovered that their ship is gone!" was the greeting the young officer gave us.

He was hardly able to restrain his excitement; the prospect of a brush with the sorcerers seemed to give him great joy.

The steam chant and the tolling of the bell continued, as if intended for a general alarm.

"Must be getting their gang together!" the ensign remarked. "They'll be laying for us now, but we'll give them a run for their money!"

The liner now was beginning to get under considerable headway.

"We're in dangerous quarters until we get out of this stretch of darkness!" the officer announced. "Here—you fellows each take a pair of glasses! You, doctor, keep watch from the starboard end of the bridge! You"—indicating myself—"go to the port side! Watch like hawks!"

We started, but—the command had come too late!

With a dull, long-drawn ripping sound from her interior, the great liner suddenly staggered and listed heavily to port! We were thrown off our feet.

"*Struck a rock!*" Ensign Hallock shouted, as he leaped up. And instantly he began signaling frantically to stop the engines. Almost in the same breath he yelled: "Go below—both of you—quick! See what damage has been done!"

As we rushed down from the bridge we could tell from the *feel* of things that the vessel's progress had come to a stop: the *Nippon* was stuck fast!

At the head of the stairs leading to the boiler room we met the seamen, who had been doing stoker duty, rushing up.

"You can't go down there!" they shouted. "The whole bottom's torn out!"

Nevertheless, we leaped past them and continued below. But near the bottom of the stairs we were brought up short. A few lights still were burning, and in their feeble rays we could see huge foaming torrents pouring into the place. Already the floor was awash to a depth of two or three feet, and before we could take our eyes from the sight the flood

seemed to rise several inches! Any moment the boilers might explode!

Up the steps we dashed madly.

As we reached the deck everyone was hurrying aft. We joined in the rush.

The tolling of the temple bell and the shrieking of the destroyer's whistle continued in the distance: the Seuen-H'sin was preparing to take up our pursuit!

Then, before we could make another move, the vessel suddenly lurched backward and listed heavily to starboard, with her stern rising high out of the water. Then she began to nose forward under the waves.

The Nippon was sinking!

CHAPTER XI

A WILD NIGHT'S WORK

"LOWER THE BOATS!" yelled Ensign Hallock.

The coolness, readiness and energy of this young man in any emergency were an inspiration.

All of us flew to obey the command, our number dividing between the two boats nearest the stern. The liner was sinking so fast that in a few moments the boats would be afloat, anyway; nevertheless, we soon had our craft in the water.

"Take that canvas covering!" bawled the ensign. "We may need it for a sail!"

A sailor dragged the canvas into the boat, and we pushed off from the vessel.

The other party had encountered trouble with the davit-blocks, which occasioned a slight delay, and Hallock was just getting his boat into the water when—

With a terrific crash, the *Nippon's* boilers burst!

The huge craft broke in two amidship, the central portion of her decks leaping out of the water. The force of the explosion hurled Ensign Hallock and his men—lifeboat and all—over the stern amid a hurricane of débris, while our own craft was flung bottom-up with great violence, scattering us all about in the water.

In an incredibly brief time the *Nippon* slipped from view under the waves, the swiftness of her sinking causing a violent suction that swept us into a whirlpool filled with timbers, broken boats and wreckage of all sorts.

Something heavy struck me on the head and knocked me almost senseless, but I clutched a floating object and hung on in a daze. Presently I heard voices calling not far away and, swimming toward them, I found a couple of men clinging to the life-boat. Others quickly began to join us—among them Dr. Gresham. Soon we had the boat righted and found it undamaged. Someone picked up some oars.

Then we began rowing about the scene of the wreck, shouting and keeping a lookout for other survivors. In this way we rescued seven more men—one of the last of these being Ensign Hallock, who was dazed from a bad cut on the head.

After a time, believing further search to be futile, we made our way to the north bank of the fiord.

There now were only fifteen of us left—twelve men having perished in the explosion. While we were roughly dressing the wounds of the injured, we began to hear excited shouts in Chinese from the other side of the water, but the width of the fiord here was such as to make the cries indistinct. As the voices did not draw nearer, we began to believe that the sorcerers possessed no small boats in which to cross to the scene of the wreck. This gave us a greater feeling of safety, since the only way the sorcerers could get at us for the present was by swimming; and not enough of them were likely to try to constitute a serious menace.

In the distance the whistling and bell-ringing had now died out.

Hastily conferring upon what should be done, we decided to stick to the life-boat and drop down the channel, hoping to get out of the country of the Seuen-H'sin before daylight. This course seemed feasible, since the whole north bank of the fiord—the side opposite the village—was now in shadow.

We started at once, rowing along silently, close to the shore. Occasionally we heard voices on the south bank, but we made no closer acquaintance with the Chinese.

As we drew near the *Albatross,* we muffled our oarlocks with bits of cloth torn from our clothing, and took every precaution against making a sound.

A few lights were burning upon the destroyer's deck, but otherwise she seemed deserted; possibly the Seuen-H'sin believed we had perished in the blowing up of the *Nippon,* and that they had nothing more to fear from intruders.

All at once, as we began to drop below the vessel, Ensign Hallock gave an order to cease rowing. Drawing us close together so we could hear his whispered words, he announced:

"Boys, let's try to recapture the *Albatross!*"

Then, with repressed excitement, he unfolded a plan.

To our ears the ensign's words sounded like a proposal of suicide; but the situation was appallingly desperate, and the upshot of the matter was that we decided to make the attempt.

"Who is to go with you?" I asked Hallock.

Several of the men promptly volunteered, and the ensign selected a muscular seaman named Jim Burns.

Agreeing upon a signal that should inform us when to follow them, the officer and his partner slipped off most of their clothing and, arming themselves only with knives, swam away. In a few seconds they were lost from sight.

From Hallock himself, afterward, I learned the story of their daring undertaking—although I am certain he greatly minimized the dangers they ran.

Reaching the deep shadows beside the destroyer, Hallock and Burns swam forward to the anchor chain hanging from the bow. There they waited a time, but, hearing not a sound from above, the officer climbed up the chain and looked over the edge of the deck. No one was in sight.

He signaled Burns to come after him. Then, clinging to the edge of the deck, with their bodies dangling down the side of the hull, out of sight of anyone above, they worked their way, hand-over-hand, back to a point opposite the after companionway. Still none of the Chinamen was in evidence.

The deck was lighted at this point and the rays of other electric lamps poured out of the open companionway; nevertheless, the men swung themselves up, climbed the rail, and darted to the side of the deck house. Leaving Burns here, Hallock crept alone around the corner to the companionway.

Just as he reached the open door he almost collided with a Chinaman coming up the stairs!

Both were taken completely by surprise, but the ensign recovered quickest, and before there was time for an outcry he had the Mongolian by the throat and was choking the life out of him.

Soon the fellow crumpled limply upon the deck. Hallock drew his knife to finish the business—but at that instant there came the sound of voices approaching along the deck.

Seizing the unconscious Chinaman by the arms, Hallock dragged him swiftly around the corner of the deck house to where Burns was waiting.

Would the approaching men enter the companionway and go below, or come on back to the stern? In the latter case they were bound to discover the intruders.

With drawn knives, the two Americans stood ready; the success or failure

of their whole enterprise depended upon the next few seconds.

But the Chinamen turned down the steps, and their voices soon died out in the interior of the vessel.

Thus assured of safety again for the moment, Ensign Hallock ended the career of the Mongolian and dragged the body into the deeper shadows in the stern. Then the two men advanced together to the companionway. Everything appeared quiet below.

Down the stairs they noiselessly crept. At the bottom they could faintly hear voices—seemingly many of them—somewhere forward, or else on the next lower level. But they did not hesitate. The officer indicated the door of a compartment only a dozen feet away. They reached it and got inside.

The room had been converted, during this voyage, into a storeroom. Among its miscellaneous contents was a quantity of tear bombs—grenades that discharge a gas which makes the victim's eyes water until he is temporarily blinded and helpless. To obtain all these missiles they could carry was the work of but a few seconds, after which the Americans dashed for the steps and started to the deck.

Just as they got halfway up, a couple of Chinamen appeared suddenly in the passage below and caught sight of them. The Celestials uttered loud warning cries and darted after the visitors.

Instantly Seaman Burns, who was behind, hurled one of the bombs to the floor at the foot of the ladder—and then another and another.

The sorcerers halted a moment, surprised by the missiles—and before they could resume their rush they were blinded by tears. Screaming in rage and dismay, they retreated down the passage toward the other voices that were beginning to respond to their cries.

With this, Burns ran on up to the deck.

"Stay here and hold this stairway!" ordered Hallock. "I'll go forward to the other ladder! Don't let any of them reach the deck!"

And the officer ran off.

He reached the forward companionway just as half a dozen of the Chinamen were crowding toward the foot of the stairs. A couple of the bombs hurled among them drove them back. Two more missiles followed; then Hallock slammed the door shut and fastened it.

Running to the rail, he signaled us to advance. In two or three minutes our rowboat was alongside and we were scrambling up the anchor chain.

On the main deck, under the bridge, formerly had been stored a number of rifles, and Hallock now ran to see if these were still there. Luckily the Chinamen had not disturbed them, and the officer soon was back with a loaded weapon for each man.

"The effect of the tear gas must be wearing off below," he announced, "so we can go down now and clean up those devils! But confine all your shooting under decks, where it's not so likely to be heard on shore!"

"And," interposed Dr. Gresham, "don't show a spark of mercy, or we will be certain to pay dearly for it later!"

Leaving six men on deck to keep watch, the rest of us divided and went down fore and aft. The gas still was strong, but no longer overpowering. The Chinese, we found, had groped their way into the engine room. Here we came upon them—forty-eight in all.

Upon the scene of slaughter that followed I will draw the veil. Thus the Seuen-H'sin had slain our comrades—and we knew that, were our positions now reversed, we would meet the same bloody end. Suffice it to say that within fifteen minutes the last of the sorcerers' bodies had been disposed of overboard.

Once more we were masters of the *Albatross!*

Our first move, we decided, would be to steam down the channel a few miles, where the Mongolians could not immediately get at us. Fortunately, two of the apprentice engineers were among the survivors, and they undertook to handle the machinery.

At the same time, Hallock and most of the crew went to work setting up rapid fire guns in convenient places to repel invasion, and storing ammunition and hand grenades on deck. A couple of the larger guns likewise were unlimbered, ready for action.

By the time these tasks were completed, steam had been gotten up, and the vessel began its retreat down the channel.

Meanwhile, Dr. Gresham and myself hastened to the radio room to summon aid from the Mare Island navy yard at San Francisco.

But barely had the astronomer placed the receivers to his ears and reached forward to adjust the apparatus, before a startling event forestalled his call.

CHAPTER XII

THE VOICE OF SCIENCE

AT THE PRECISE instant when Dr. Gresham seated himself as the radio of the *Albatross,* the great Consolidated News Syndicate, which dealt with newspapers all over the world, was broadcasting a "flash" of terrible import:

An hour ago New York had been wiped out by a stupendous tidal wave!

Details of the disaster still were lacking.

And then, before the astronomer could lift a hand to send his call, some instantaneous and terrific disturbance of the atmosphere blotted out all wireless communication!

What this disturbance might be, or what it might portend, seemed to arouse in my companion the gravest alarm. His face looked ashen as he sat there at the key. Over and over he sought to get Mare Island, but without success: the other was as unresponsive as if his instruments were dead.

Presently he rose without a word and, motioning me to follow, sought Ensign Hallock on the bridge. Briefly he told the young officer about the destruction of Manhattan, adding:

"Something serious has happened somewhere in the world, since then, completely to disorder the atmosphere. It may be the earth's final struggle for existence. Unless the Seuen-H'sin's power is broken *at once,* the end is near! It is too late to wait for reinforcements. We must tackle the job ourselves—at any cost! The question is: how are we going to do it?"

Hallock thought a few moments, and then replied:

"We can't bomb the place from an airplane, because we brought no airplane bombs. And we can't shell it with the ship's guns without knowing its exact location. Our planes aren't equipped with range finders, either—so it would do no good to try to locate it from the air.

"That," he added with decision, "leaves us no choice but a direct attack!"

"Well," responded Dr. Gresham, "at any cost, we've got to try!"

At once we consulted the ship's charts—and made a discovery.

Not far below our present location, a tributary fiord entered Dean Channel from the left, and with sudden hope we saw that this waterway twisted back among the mountains for several miles—reaching a point in one of its windings where it was not more than six or seven miles directly south of the region in which the power plant was hidden.

"There's our chance!" Hallock announced. "If the sorcerers have missed the *Albatross,* they'll think we are on our way out of the country as fast as we can travel. They won't be expecting us to come back so soon—in broad daylight. We can steam up this side channel to the proper spot and then march across the mountains until we find the plant."

"Good!" assented the scientist. "They are less likely to be on guard against an attack from that side, anyway!"

Day was now beginning to break, which made further navigation easy. In a few minutes we came to the tributary inlet, and swung the vessel in between its high, constricted walls.

The ensign was now imbued with marvelous activity. Orders flew thick and fast. A couple of the machine guns were made ready for land transport. Two light mountain mortars and a quantity of ammunition were brought up on deck. A supply of shrapnel hand grenades was distributed among the men.

Our progress through this tortuous waterway necessarily was slow; nevertheless, at the end of an hour and a half, the destroyer was stopped and we made ready for the final adventure.

It was decided that all fifteen of us should go, because less than that number could not carry our equipment up and down the steep mountainsides, and three or four men left to guard the ship would be utterly useless in the event of an attack.

So, with every nerve alert, we struck out through the trackless wilderness.

Three hours later we came upon six large steel conduits which we knew must convey the water power to the plant, and in a few minutes we had followed these to our goal.

Here we found ourselves upon the brow of a promontory directly behind and fully 300 feet above the Seuen-H'sin's workshop. The promontory ended in a sheer precipice, from the outermost curve of which the conduits dropped straight down into the powerhouse. This tremendous fall of the six streams of water supplied the enormous energy to the turbines. The summit of this projecting ridge was fairly level, and for a distance of perhaps seventy-five yards at the end the timber had been entirely cleared away.

Extending out from the brow of the precipice, and resting upon the tops of the conduits where they plunged downward, was a narrow bridge of iron lattice-work which connected all six of the pipes and gave access to the bolts which tightened the steel elbows. Through holes in this grating, iron ladders fastened between the pipes and the granite cliff back of them descended clear to the bottom of the precipice.

A slight rail only three feet high protected the outer edge of this grid—a little hand-hold for the workmen in case of a misstep. From this dizzy balcony it would be possible to drop a stone almost upon the roof of the powerhouse.

After a quick look around, Ensign Hallock chose a spot a little back from the cliff to set up the mortars that were to throw explosives upon the building. He also prepared to place mines under the conduits. But first the machine guns were planted to command the surrounding timber, in case of an attack.

There still was no indication that the sorcerers suspected our presence in their vicinity; so, inasmuch as Hallock said his preparations would take some little time, Dr. Gresham determined to employ the interval in getting a closer look at the power plant.

One of the ladders down the precipice, he had noticed, was in such a position behind its water main that it could not be seen from the building; and he decided to attempt the approach by this means. To my delight, he made no objection to my accompanying him.

As we slipped through an opening in the iron bridge and started our dizzy descent of the ladder—which seemed to sway beneath our weight—I felt a thrill of exultation, in spite of our peril, at the thought that at last we were to solve the mystery of the Seuen-H'sin's terrible power over our planet!

The trip was slow and risky, but finally we came abreast of a window in the rear wall of the building, and by stretching around the side of the thick water main we could see into the place.

The workshop of the sorcerers was a long, low, narrow structure directly beside the river. Like the houses back in the Chinese village, it was a mere shell of corrugated iron, its steel framework so bolted together that it could sway with the earth tremors.

In a row down the centre of the structure were six huge turbines, operating electric generators.

Along one side of the room was the largest switchboard I had ever seen, while the whole of the other lengthwise wall was flanked with a series of massive induction coils, elaborately insulated from each other and from the ground. Although I knew little about electricity, I was certain that if the combined electrical output of those dynamos were directed through that maze of coils, the resulting voltage could only be measured in the millions—perhaps hundreds of millions!

From one large, enclosed object, supported on steel uprights over the row of induction coils, two electric cables, more than two inches in diameter, ran off through the north end of the building. One of these ended in a tiny structure about eighty yards from the powerhouse. The other ran on up the valley.

But, most curious of all, in the center of the switchboards was an apparatus surmounted by a large clock, before which a Chinese attendant sat constantly. Precisely every eleven minutes and six seconds a bell on this clock clanged sharply, and there was a bright flash in a long glass tube, followed by an earth shock.

For some time we clung there in the shadows, while Dr. Gresham studied every detail of the amazing workshop. Then, calling my attention to the fact that the place outside the powerhouse, where one of the cables ended, was hidden from view of the attendants inside by a thick clump of trees, the astronomer said he wanted a closer look at this place.

Creeping through the timber, we reached the tiny structure over the cable's end. Not the slightest watch seemed to be kept anywhere about the plant. The door to the house was not fastened, so we entered and looked hurriedly about.

The room was absolutely empty except for the heavy cable, which came to the center of the floor and there connected with a copper post about four inches in diameter that ran straight down into the ground.

Without lingering further, we crawled back to the ladder and commenced our long climb up the cliff.

Upon reaching the top again, we found the ensign and his men still busy with their preparations for the bombardment. Withdrawing far enough to be out of their hearing, the astronomer turned to me and remarked:

"Well, what do you think of the scientific achievements of the sorcerers now?"

"I don't know what to think!" I replied. "It's utterly beyond my comprehension!"

The doctor chuckled at my dismay.

"Forgive me," he said, "for having kept you so long in the dark. Until today I could never prove my theories—certain as I was of their correctness—and I did not wish to attempt any explanations until I was sure of my ground. But now you have seen enough to understand the solution of the puzzle."

To my delight, the scientist was dropping into one of his most communicative moods. After a moment he went on:

"To comprehend, even in a general way, what the Seuen-H'sin has done, you must understand the principle of resonance.

"Let us start with the swinging pendulum of a clock. What keeps it in motion? Nothing but a slight push, delivered at exactly the right time. Any

swinging object can be kept swinging, even though it weigh many tons, if it is given a touch by the finger of a baby at *just the right moment*. By the same principle, the amount of swing can be increased enormously if the successive pushes are correctly timed.

"But we need not limit our illustration to swinging objects. Everything in the word has a natural period of vibration, whether it be a violin string, or a battleship, or a forty-story skyscraper.

"Fifty men can capsize a twenty-thousand-ton battleship merely by running back and forth from one side of the deck to the other and carefully timing their trips to the vessel's rolling. A child with a tack hammer can shake down a forty-story skyscraper if he can discover the natural period of the building's vibration and then tap persistently upon the steel framework at the correct intervals.

"Even the earth itself has its natural period of vibration.

"If you exploded a ton of dynamite on top of the ground it would blow quite a hole and jar the earth for several miles around it; and that would be all. But if you set off another ton of dynamite, and then another and another, and kept it up continuously—always timing the explosions to the period of the earth's vibration—eventually the jar would be felt clear through the globe. And if you still persisted, in time you would wreck the world.

"Such is the accumulative power of many little blows correctly timed. The principle of timing small impulses to produce large effects is the principle of resonance.

"But there are other forces in nature which can produce vibration— electricity, for instance. Nikola Tesla demonstrated a number of years ago that the globe is resonant to electric waves.

"Now, suppose some person constructed an apparatus that could suddenly turn a tremendous flood of electric waves into the earth. That energy would go clear through the globe, imparting a tiny impulse to every atom of matter of which the sphere is composed—like a push upon the pendulum of a clock.

"And suppose that person knew the exact period of the earth's vibration, and sent another bolt, and another and another, into the globe—all exactly timed to impart a fresh impulse at the correct moment—to give the pendulum another push, so to speak. Then let him pile electric impulse upon electric impulse, each at just the right second, until the accumulation of them all represented millions of horsepower in electric oscillations. In time, *the world would be shaken to pieces!*

"And—impossible as it sounds—that is the very principle the Seuen-H'sin is using there beneath your eyes! The dynamos furnish the power, and that great battery of induction coils magnifies it to an almost inconceivable voltage. By those cables attached to copper plugs, the impulses are conveyed to the earth.

"Every blow of that tremendous electric hammer is heavier than the preceding one because it has the accumulated power of all the others behind it. With every blow the earth grows weaker—less able to stand the shock. Continued, the planet's doom would be inevitable—if it is not already so!"

I had been listening to this recital with amazement too profound to admit of interruption. When Dr. Gresham finished I sat silent, turning it all over in my mind, and reflecting how simple the explanation seemed. Finally—

"Was it those electric waves being discharged into the ground," I asked, "that Professor Howard Whiteman in Washington mistook for wireless signals from Mars?"

"Precisely!" was the answer.

"And how," I inquired, "was it possible for the sorcerers to discover the exact period of the earth's vibration? That seems little short of superhuman."

"Doubtless you remember the newspaper accounts published that night when we returned from Labrador," replied the doctor. "They told how the electric whispers, when first noticed, occurred exactly two minutes apart; then the interval increased one minute each night until the signals were separated by more than thirty minutes; afterward the lulls altered erratically for some time, until they became fixed at eleven minutes and six seconds."

"Yes," I assented.

"Well," continued the scientist, "those variations simply denoted the experiment of the Seuen-H'sin to ascertain the period of the globe's vibration. If, after continuing their discharges all one night, their seismographs showed no response from the earth, they know their bolts were wrongly timed, and they experimented with another period.

"Eventually they found that their impulses penetrated the earth with a speed of approximately 709 miles a minute—in other words, in precisely eleven minutes and six seconds the waves passed clear through the plant. This, then, was demonstrated to be the length of time that must elapse before the pendulum—figuratively speaking—could be given another electrical push. You saw just now, on the switchboard down there, the clockwork apparatus which times those bolts."

After a moment's consideration I remarked:

"Your own electrical equipment on board the *Albatross*—those big induction coils and the rest of it—what did you plan to do with that?"

"I had meant to fight the Seuen-H'sin with its own methods," the doctor replied. "I was going to throw a high-power electric current into the earth at intervals between those of the sorcerers' —say five minutes apart. That would have interfered with the acceleration of the vibrations—like setting a second group of men to run across the ship's deck between the trips of the first group. One set of vibrations would have neutralized the other.

"But," Dr. Gresham added, "the time for such methods is past. We must end the whole thing immediately—at one stroke!"

Receiving a signal from Ensign Hallock that he was ready, we started to rejoin the ship's party. But before we had gone a dozen steps we were rooted to the spot by a new terror!

Off in the east, where the snow-covered peaks lifted into the sky, suddenly burst forth an awful crashing sound, as of a colossal cannonade—a ponderous and unbroken thunder-roll, terrible as the enormous tumult of the day of doom. As our gaze followed the nightmare sounds to the edge of the world we beheld the lofty mountains oscillate, crack, disjoint, and crumble into seething ruin.

The noise that accompanied this destruction came roaring and booming across the intervening miles—a stupendous and unearthly commotion, shattering the very atmosphere to fragments.

For a minute Dr. Gresham stood petrified. But as the enormity of the cataclysm became evident, an unconscious cry, almost a groan, escaped him:

"Too late! Too late! The beginning of the end!"

Suddenly he wheeled—almost livid with excitement—to the naval officer and screamed at the top of his voice:

"*Fire!* For God's sake destroy that power plant! *Fire! FIRE!*"

CHAPTER XIII

PLAYING OUR FINAL CARD

IN THEIR ASTONISHMENT at the terrible upheaval, Ensign Hallock and his men had left their posts and crowded toward the end of the promontory, a few feet away from the mortars. At Dr. Gresham's command to fire, most of them leaped to obey the order.

Instantly the woods behind us sprang

into life as a horde of Chinamen dashed from cover, charging straight at us!

From the size of the attacking force, it was evident our presence had been know for some time and our capture delayed until a sufficient number of the sorcerers could be assembled to insure our defeat: there seemed to be scores of the blue-clad figures. Most of them were armed with rifles, although some had only knives and a few iron bars which they wielded as clubs.

The distance across the clearing was not much more than 200 feet, and the Chinamen advanced at a run—without any outcry.

But before they had traversed a quarter of the space Ensign Hallock recovered from his surprise and, with a few terse commands, led his crew into action. Dashing to the machine guns, the seamen threw themselves flat on the ground; and while some manned these weapons, the rest resorted to their revolvers. In two or three seconds the booming of the distant cataclysm was augmented by a steady volley of firing.

With deadly effect the machine guns raked the advancing semi-circle of Mongolians. As the foremost line began suddenly to melt away, the rest of the sorcerers wavered and presently came to a halt. They now were not more than a hundred feet from us. At a command, they all dropped down upon the ground, the ones with rifles in front, and began to return our fire.

I had drawn my revolver and joined in the fight—and so had Dr. Gresham beside me. But in our excitement we had remained on our feet, and I now heard the astronomer shouting at me:

"Lie down! *Lie down!*"

Even as I dropped, my hat was knocked off by a bullet; but, unharmed, I stretched out and continued shooting.

Pausing to slip a fresh magazine of cartridges into my automatic, I suddenly became aware that a vast wind was starting to blow out of the east; the very air seemed alive and quivering.

The Chinamen still outnumbered us heavily, and all at once I realized—chiefly from the lessening of our fire—that their rifle attack was beginning to take effect. Glancing about, I saw five or six of the seamen lying motionless.

At this juncture one of the machine guns jammed, and while its crew was trying to fix it the yellow devils took toll of several more of our men. I now saw that only six of us were left to fight.

Simultaneously I became half conscious of a strange, mysterious something going on about us—a subtle, ghostly change, not on the earth itself, but in the air above—some throbbing, indefinable suggestion of impending doom—of the end of things.

Snatching a glance over my shoulder, I saw arising upon the eastern horizon a black, monstrous cloud of appalling aspect—a spuming billow of sable mist—twisting, flying, lifting into the heavens with tremendous speed. And each moment the wind was growing more violent.

Was this, after all, to be the finish? Was the world—the white man's world, which we had fought so hard to save—to go to smash through these yellow devils' fiendishness? Having come within actual sight of the machinery that was the cause of it all, was our task to remain unfinished?

With a terrible cold fury clutching at my heart, I crawled quickly forward, discharging my revolver steadily as I went, to lend a hand with the disabled machine gun.

But as I reached it Ensign Hallock dropped the weapon, with a gesture of uselessness, and moved quickly back to the mortars. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him trying to fire the things, and a wave of fierce joy seized me.

But the task caused the naval officer to half raise himself from the ground, and as he did so I saw him clutch at a bleeding gash on his head and fall forward, where he lay still.

An instant later the Chinamen leaped to their feet with a loud cry and charged upon us. They, too, were greatly reduced in numbers, but there were only four of us now, so nothing remained but an attempt at retreat. As we did so we began hurling our hand grenades, all the while moving slowly in the only direction we could go—toward the brink of the precipice.

Suddenly, above the crack of the rifles and the exploding of the grenades, an enormous roaring burst forth in the east—a sinister screaming of immeasurable forces, moaning, hooting, shrieking across the world—the weird, awful voice of the wounded planet's stupendous agony.

This new terror attracted so much attention that there was a momentary pause in the sorcerers' onslaught, and in that brief lull I noted that our grenades had wrought terrible havoc among the Chinamen, reducing their number to a mere handful. Dr. Gresham saw this at the same time, and shouted to us to let them have it again with the missiles.

Apparently sensing the purport of this command, the Chinamen sprang forward, seeking to engage us at too close range for the grenades to be used. But several of the missiles met them almost at their first leap, and when the hurricane of shrapnel abated, there remained only three of the yellow fiends to continue the attack.

But at the same time I made the grim discovery that on our side Dr. Gresham and myself alone survived!

With the realization that it had now come to a hand-to-hand encounter, I braced myself to meet the shock as the trio darted forward. I somehow felt that nothing mattered any longer, anyway, for so tremendous had become the earth-tumult that it seemed impossible the planet could resist disruption many minutes more.

Nevertheless, the passions of a wild animal surged within me; a sort of madness steeled my muscles.

One powerful, thick-set Chinaman leaped upon Dr. Gresham and the two went down in a striking, clawing test of strength. A second later the remaining pair hurled themselves upon me.

I whipped out my revolver just as one fellow seized me from the front, and, pressing the weapon against his body, I fired. In a moment he relaxed his hold and crumpled down at my feet. The other chap now had me around the neck from the rear and was shutting off my wind. Round and round we staggered, as I vainly sought to loosen his hold. Before long everything went black in front of me and I thought I was done for—when I heard faintly, in a daze, the crack of a revolver. Quickly the grip about my neck fell away.

When I began to come to myself again I saw Ensign Hallock sitting up on the ground, his face covered with blood, but wielding the revolver that had ended the career of my last adversary.

At the same time I saw that the officer was trying desperately to train his weapon upon something behind me. Looking about, I saw Dr. Gresham and his opponent rolling over and over on the ground, almost at the edge of the precipice, struggling frantically for possession of a knife. Because of their rapid changes of position, Hallock dared not shoot, for fear of hitting the scientist.

Just then the Chinaman came on top for an instant, and I leaped forward, aiming my revolver at him. The trigger snapped, but there was no report. The weapon was empty.

Less than a dozen feet now separated me from the wrestlers, when the Celestial suddenly jerked the knife free and raised it for a swift stroke.

With all my strength I hurled the empty revolver at the yellow devil. It struck him squarely between the eyes. The knife dropped and he clutched at

his face, at the same time struggling to his feet to meet the new attack.

Freed from the struggle, Dr. Gresham's figure relaxed as in a swoon.

Instantly I was after the Chinaman—without a thought of his bull-like strength. I was seeing red. The furious joy of the primeval man hunter—the lust for blood—turned my head. My one idea was to kill.

Leaping over the prostrate scientist, I flung myself at the last of the sorcerers. He had retreated three or four feet, and now stood at bay upon the iron bridge that ran along the top of the water mains, overhanging the precipice. As I dashed at him he stepped quickly aside. I missed him—any my heart leaped into my throat as I stumbled across the perilous eyrie and brought up against the outer rail, which seemed to sway.

I staggered, seized the rod, and saved myself. Far, far below, jagged rocks and the roof of the Seuen-H'sin's powerhouse greeted my gaze.

And at the same time—although I was not conscious of paying attention to it—I became sensible of the fact that the monstrous cloud above the horizon was soaring swiftly, beating its black wings close to the sun—and that a weird twilight, a ghostly gloom, was settling over everything. From the distance, too, still came that appalling uproar.

As I recovered my balance the Chinaman bounded at me. But his foot caught in the grating and he stumbled to his knees. Instantly I threw myself upon him. My knee bored into the small of his back; my fingers sank into his throat. *I had him!* If I could keep my hold a little while the life would be strangled from his body.

In spite of his disadvantage, the fellow staggered to his feet. And there above the void—upon that narrow steel framework, protected only by its leg-high rail—we began a life-and-death struggle.

I hung on, like a mountain lion upon the back of its prey, while the Chinaman lurched and twisted this way and that.

Once he staggered against the railing, lost his footing, swung around—and I hung out over empty space, a drop of fully 300 feet. I thought the end had come—that we would topple off into the void. But his mighty strength pulled us back upon the grating—the whole slight structure seeming to sway and creak as he did so.

I tightened my grip upon his throat, digging my fingers into his windpipe, until I felt the life ebbing out of him in a steady flow. My own strength was almost gone, but the primitive desire to kill kept me clinging there tenaciously.

At last he began to weaken. In his death throes he lurched about in a circle—until his foot slipped through a manhole above one of the ladders, and he fell across the rail with a choking moan. With me hanging upon his back he began to slip outward and downward, inch by inch.

I knew the end had come. He was falling—and I was falling with him. But thoughts of my own death were smothered in a wild rejoicing. I had conquered this yellow fiend! Everything grew blurred before my eyes as we sagged toward the final plunge into the gorge.

Suddenly my ankles were seized in a stout grip, and I felt myself being dragged back from the sickening void. With this, I loosened my hold upon the Chinaman's throat, and his body went hurtling past me to its doom.

Another instant and I was off the rocking bridge, upon solid ground, and Dr. Ferdinand Gresham was shaking me in an effort to restore my senses.

He had recovered from his own fainting spell just in time to save me from being dragged over the cliff.

Swiftly I drew myself together. The weird twilight was deepening. But a few feet away I beheld Ensign Hallock, busy at the mortars and mines, preparing to touch them off.

He motioned to us to run. We did so. In a moment his work was finished and he took after us.

Back along the ridge we fled, away from the danger of the coming blast.

A couple of hundred yards distant, and about fifty feet below us, a bare promontory jutted out from the hillside, affording an unobstructed view of the whole region— the crumbling mountains upon the horizon, the power plant at the base of the cliff, and the bare space behind us where the mines were about to end the career of the sorcerers' workshop.

We started to descend to this plateau—when suddenly I dragged my companions back and pointed excitedly below, exclaiming:

"Look! Look!"

There in the center of the promontory, seemingly all alone, stood the arch fiend of all this havoc—the high priest of the sorcerers, Kwo-Sung-tao!

Apparently the old fellow had chosen this spot whence he could view in safety his followers' attack upon our party. He had not heard my outcry behind him, and remained absorbed in the Titanic upheaval of the distant mountains.

As I looked down upon his shriveled figure, a wave of savage joy swept over me! At last fate was strangely playing into our hands! Quite unsuspecting, the most menacing figure of the ages—the master mind of diabolical achievement, the would-be "dictator of human destiny"—had been cast into our net for final vengeance!

Just then the mortars boomed, and two charges of high explosives went hurtling toward the roof of the powerhouse.

Kwo-Sung-tao wheeled and stared off toward the opposite promontory. Seeing nothing, he hesitated in alarm. He did not look around in our direction.

Another instant and the explosives fell squarely upon the roof of the building, and with two frightful detonations—so close together that they seemed almost as one—the whole structure burst asunder vanished in a flying tornado of débris. For a few moments nothing was visible save a tremendous geyser of dirt, steel, concrete and bits of machinery.

While the air was filled with this gust of wreckage, my gaze sped back to the leader of the Seuen-H'sin.

The old man stood stock still, petrified by this sudden destruction of all his hopes and work. What agony of soul he was enduring in that moment I could only guess. His mummified figure suddenly to have shriveled unbelievably—to be actually withering before our eyes!

Just then the mines under the water mains went off, ripping the conduits to tatters—and the immense hydraulic force, suddenly released, roared down the precipice, tearing the ground at the bottom of the gorge away to the foundation rock and obliterating the last scrap of wreckage!

Almost at the same moment Dr. Gresham left us and plunged down the slope toward the high priest, as if to settle the score with him alone. Recovering from our surprise, we followed rapidly.

Apparently sensing the danger, Kwo-Sung-tao suddenly glanced around. As he beheld Dr. Gresham he pulled himself together and I saw a look of malignity come over his face such as I never before nor since have seen upon a human countenance! It was as if he sought to blast his enemy with a glance!

The demoniacal fury of that gaze actually caused the astronomer to slacken his rush.

Promptly the old sorcerer's hand darted beneath his robe and came out with a revolver. But before the weapon could be aimed I had snatched a hand grenade and hurled at the Chinaman. The missile flew over him, exploding some feet away; but a bit of its metal must have hit the old fellow, inflicting a serious wound, for he dropped the revolver and clutched at his side.

(Continued on page 118)

In All the World There Was No Man Quite Like This One

The Man the Law Forgot

By WALTER NOBLE BURNS

THE JAIL was silent. Boisterous incoherencies that in the day made the vast gloomy pile of stone and iron a bedlam—talk, curses, laughter—were stilled.

The prisoners were asleep in their cells. Dusty electric bulbs at sparse intervals made a dusky twilight in the long, hushed corridors. Moonlight, shimmering through the tall, narrow windows, laid barred, luminous lozenges on the stone floors.

From the death cell in "Murderers' Row," the voice of Guisseppi rose in the still night watches in the *Miserere*. Its first mellow notes broke the slumberous silence with dulcet crashes like the breaking of ice crystals beneath a silver hammer. Vibrating through the cavernous spaces of the sleeping prison, the clear boyish voice lifting the burden of the solemn hymn was by turns a tender caress, a flight of white wings up into sunny skies, a silver whisper stealing through the glimmering aisles, a swift stream of plashing melody, a flaming rush of music.

"A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The prayer in its draperies of melody filled the cells like a shining presence and laid its blessing of hope upon hopeless hearts. From the shadow of the gallows, Guisseppi poured forth his soul in music that was benediction and farewell.

Bitter memories, like sneering ghosts that elbow one another, crowd the road to Gallows Hill. In swift retrospect, Guisseppi reviewed his life's last tragic phase. Young, with healthy blood dancing gay dances through his veins, sunny-spirited, spilling over with the happiness and hopefulness of irresponsibility, he had not despaired when the death sentence was pronounced.

The court's denial of his lawyer's motion for a new trial left him with undiminished optimism. Yet a while longer hope sustained him when his old father and mother kissed him good-by through the bars and set off for the state capital to intercede with the governor.

Bowed with years and broken with sorrow, they had pleaded in tears and on their knees. The venerable father, lost for words, helplessly inarticulate, the mother with her black shawl over her head, white-faced, hysterical, both praying for the life of their only son, were a picture to melt a heart of stone.

The pathos of it stirred the governor to the depths, but could not make him forget that for the moment he stood as the incarnation of the law and the inexorable justice that is the theory of the law. With heavy heart and misty eyes, he turned away.

So hope at last had died. And between the death of hope and the death that awaited him, Guisseppi brooded in the death-cell, bitterly counting his numbered days as they slipped one by one into the past, each day bringing him that much nearer to certain annihilation. Round and round the dial, the hands of the clock on the prison wall went in a never-ending funeral march; the *tick-tock, tick-tock* of the pendulum, measuring off the fateful seconds, echoed in his heart like a death knell.

Times without number he repeated to himself that he was not afraid to die. Nevertheless the inevitability of death tortured him. At times, in sheer terror, he seized the rigid bars of his cell, pounded his fists against the iron walls, till the blood spurted from his knuckles. He was like a sparrow charmed by a serpent, fluttering vainly to escape, but drawing ever nearer to certain death. Black walls of death kept closing in upon him inexorably, like a mediaeval torture chamber.

Some men, the experts say, are born criminals; other are made criminals by some fortuity or crisis of circumstances. Guisseppi had been a happy, healthy, careless boy. His father was a small shopkeeper of the Italian quarter who had achieved a certain prosperity. His mother was a typical Italian mother, meek, long-suffering, tender, her whole life wrapped up in her boy, her husband and her home.

Guisseppi had received a good common school education. He had been a choir boy in Santa Michaela Church, and the range and beauty of his voice had won him fame even beyond the borders of the colony; musicians for whom he had sung had grown enthusiastic over his promise and had encouraged him to study for the operatic stage.

The exuberance of youth, and love of gayety and adventure, had been responsible for his first misstep. His companions of the streets had enticed him into Cardello's pool room. Cardello, known to the police as "The Devil," had noted with a crafty eye the lively youth's possibilities as a useful member of his gang. His approaches were subtle—genial patronage, the pretense of goodfellowship, an intimate glass across a table. The descent to Avernus was facile.

Almost before he knew it, Guisseppi was a sworn member of Cardello's gang of reckless young daredevils and a participant in their thrilling nightly adventures. Home lessons were forgotten. His mother lost her influence over the boy. Even Rosina Stefano, the little beauty of the quarter, who had claimed all his boyish devotion since school days, had no power to turn him from his downward course.

He had been taken by the police after a robbery in which a citizen had been killed. He was condemned to death.

"I forgive everybody," Guisseppi told his death-watch. "Everybody but 'Devil' Cardello. If it had not been for him, I would be free and happy today. He made me a thief. That is his business—teaching young fools to rob for him. He did the planning; we did the jobs. We took the chances, he took the money. I was in the hold-up when the gang committed murder, but I myself killed no man.

"And now the gallows is waiting for me, while Cardello sits in his pool room, immune, prosperous, still planning crimes for other young fools. If I could sink my fingers in his throat and choke his life out, I could die happy. One thing I promise him—if my ghost can come back, I will haunt him to his dying day."

Morning dawned. Father and mother arrived for a final embrace. Rosina gave him a last kiss. A priest administered

consolation. The sheriff came and read the death warrant.

Light, flooding through the barred windows from the newly-risen sun, filled the jail with golden radiance as, through the iron corridors, feet shuffling drearily, the death march moved in solemn silence toward the gallows. . . .

DOCTORS with stethoscopes watched the final pulsations of ebbing life. They pronounced him dead.

The body was wheeled off on a tumbril into the jail morgue and turned over to assistants of an undertaker employed by the family. Placing it on a stretcher and covering it with a mantle, these hurried it to a motor ambulance waiting in the alley. They slid the stretcher into the vehicle and slammed the doors. The machine got quickly under way, gathered speed, began to fly through the streets.

No sooner had the doors of the ambulance slammed shut than strange things began to happen inside. A physician and a nurse who had been secreted in the car, fell upon the body with feverish haste, stripped it of clothing, dashed alcohol over it from head to foot, began to massage the still warm flesh, chafing the wrists, slapping limbs and torso with smart, stinging thumps.

Then, to conserve what little heat remained, they bundled the body in heavy blankets kept warm in a fireless contrivance. And all the while the ambulance, its gong clanging madly, was plunging at wild speed across the city, swaying from side to side, turning corners on two wheels.

It drew up at last in front of a small undertaking shop on a back street, and the body was hurried inside. Laid upon a table, it looked as if carved from ivory. The coal-black hair curled about the white brow in glossy abandon. The long black lashes of the nearly-shut eyes left deep shadows on the cold pallor of the cheeks. No tint of blood, no sign of life appeared.

Quickly a pulmotor was applied. Oxygen was pumped into the lungs while the body was again vigorously rubbed with alcohol. Guisseppi's father and mother and close relatives stood about in an excited group, eyes wide with feverish interest, their hearts in their mouths. Doctors and nurses worked with dynamic energy.

No sign of rekindled life rewarded them. Their drastic efforts seemed lost labor. The boy's soul, apparently, had journeyed far into the dark places beyond life's pale and was not to be lured back to its fleshly habitation.

Still they persisted, hoping against hope.

"*Per dio!*" suddenly exclaimed a physician. "Do you see that?"

A faint flush appeared in Guisseppi's cheek.

"He lives again!" burst in a tense whisper from the bloodless lips of the father.

The tiny stain spread, tinging the marble flesh.

"My boy, my darling boy!" cried the mother, wringing her hands in delirious joy.

Guisseppi's chest began to rise and fall slowly, with an almost imperceptible movement of respiration. The suspicion of a smile hovered for a moment at the corners of his mouth.

He opened his eyes. ***He lived!***

II.

"DEVIL" CARDELLO sat at his desk in a corner of his pool room. The morning was young; no customers had yet arrived to play pool or billiards. Basco, the porter, pail and mop in hand, stood for a moment gossiping.

"They say he died game," remarked Basco.

"They all do," sneered Cardello.

"And kept his mouth shut."

"No; he spilled everything. But the police didn't believe him. That's all that saved me."

"I heard he said his ghost would come back to haunt you."

"Ho! That's a good one," laughed Cardello. "The devil has got him on a spit over the fire and will keep him turning. I should worry about the little fool's ghost!"

A whisper of sound from the direction of the billiard tables caused both men to glance up.

There stood Guisseppi a few paces away, surveying them in silence, a blue-steel revolver in his hand!

"Mother of God!" screamed Basco, dropping his pail and mop, and dashing into the street.

Cardello's eyes bulged from their sockets. His face went as white as paper. Panic, terror, pulled his lips back in a ghastly grin from his chattering teeth. He rose heavily to his feet and stood swaying.

"Guisseppi!" he breathed scarcely above a whisper. "*Guisseppi!*"

Guisseppi's lips curled.

"Yes," he replied. "The boy you ruined, betrayed, sent to death on the gallows."

"No, no, Guisseppi. The *police* got you. I was your friend."

"Liar! But for you, I would be happy; my father and mother would not bear the black disgrace of a son hanged on the gallows."

"Why have you come back from the dead, Guisseppi? Why should you haunt your old pal?"

"I have a score to settle with you."

"In the name of God the Father, go back to the grave! Leave me in peace."

Guisseppi raised his weapon.

"I have come to kill you," he said.

Cardello fell upon his knees.

"Spare me, Guisseppi!" he screamed, stretching out imploring arms. "Mercy, Guisseppi, mercy! Don't—"

There was a crash—a leap of fire.

A wisp of blue smoke drifted above a billiard table.

III.

THE POLICE DRAGNET for the slayer of Cardello was far flung, and zest was added to the man hunt by the offer of $1,000 reward. Throughout the Italian quarter, Basco spread the story of Guisseppi's recrudescence and his ghostly revenge.

The superstitious residents accepted the weird tale with simple faith. Fear of the phantom became rife. Children remained indoors after dark. Pedestrians quickened their pace when passing lonely spots at night. Turning a corner suddenly, they half-expected to come face to face with Guisseppi's ghost, wry-necked from the hangman's noose.

Policeman Rafferty, traveling beat in the neighborhood of Death Corners, was told time and again that Guisseppi's ghost had murdered Cardello. Yes, it was true. Basco had seen the phantom. Others in the colony had seen it slipping like a shadow through some deserted street at night. There was no doubt that Guisseppi had come back from the dead.

Policeman Rafferty laughed. When had ghosts started in bumping off live folks? That was what he would like to know. How could the poor simpletons believe such stuff? Funny lot of jobbies, these dagoes!

But when Policeman Rafferty had heard the story of Guisseppi's ghost for the thousandth time, he scratched his head and did a little thinking, not forgetting the $1,000 reward. Guisseppi was dead. Of course. He had been hanged, and the newspapers had been full of the stories of his execution. So Guisseppi couldn't have killed Cardello. That was out of the question. But could it be possible that dead Guisseppi had a living double? Hah!

Policeman Rafferty got in touch with his favorite stool-pigeon without delay.

Shortly thereafter, that worthy laid before him a piece of information which Policeman Rafferty was welcome to for just what it was worth and no more. Guisseppi's ghost had been seen oftenest in the immediate neighborhood of Guisseppi's father's residence. If the fool copper thought he could put a pinch over on a ghost, he might do well to search Guisseppi's old home.

So Policeman Rafferty eased himself one day through a narrow passageway, burst in suddenly at the kitchen door and started to search the premises.

He found Guisseppi whiffing a cigaret in a front room.

"YES, I killed Cardello," said Guisseppi quietly. "I'll go with you."

"But who are you?" asked the policeman. "You can't be Guisseppi. They topped that boy on the gallows."

"I'm Guisseppi, all right. They brought me back to life with a pulmotor."

Policeman Rafferty's jaw dropped.

"Back to life?"

"Yes. I was as dead as stone. I was gone absolutely for an hour."

"Gone? Gone where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere. I remember standing on the trap. Then it seemed I was falling for a long time, falling—from a star—or a high mountain top—through miles of emptiness into midnight blackness. There wasn't any pain. I seemed to land on a deep soft cushion of feathers. I could *feel* the darkness. It seemed to whirl and billow round me. I couldn't see myself—or feel myself. But I knew, somehow, I was there in the heart of the darkness. I suddenly found myself on a broad road stretching away into night."

"Must ha' been the road to hell," remarked Policeman Rafferty.

"Maybe so. Along this road, I glided with the swiftness of a bird on the wing. I didn't know where I was going—"

"You were bound for hell," said Rafferty.

"I heard music away off in the dark; wonderful orchestra music, violins, 'cellos, wind pipes. It grew louder. I never heard such beautiful music. Through the solid blackness ahead, I saw a great mountain peak standing up, red and shining, against the sky.

"Around me came a glare of bright lights. I was blinded by streaks and splashes of color, darting, rolling, weaving into each other, changing all the time. Reds, purples, greens, blues, rolled over me in great, flashing waves. Flaring colors swirled around me in blazing whirlwinds. I was drowned in gorgeousness. It was as if a cyclone had wrecked a thousand rainbows and buried me beneath their ruins."

"What were these lights?"

"Search me. I don't know. I heard a loud, clear call out of the distance. I pushed through the storm of colors. Across a dark plain, I reached the shining, red mountain. I climbed up until I stood on the peak. I felt fine. Something struck me as a joke. I began laughing. Then, bending close above me, I saw the faces of my mother and father and the doctors."

"Well, Guisseppi," said Policeman Rafferty, "gettin' hung once would ha' been an elegant sufficiency for most men. They'd be leery about takin' a second chance. You must be stuck on dropping through a trap—eh?"

"Yes, they'll hang me again, all right. That's a cinch. You might think me a fool for walking with my eyes open right into this second scrape—"

"A hog," corrected Rafferty.

"I don't know. I came back from the dead to kill Cardello. And I killed him. I hated that fellow. I'd like to have tortured the life out of him, killed him by inches. His cries of agony would have been wine to me. It's hell to be hanged. I ought to know. But I can go back to the gallows now with a light heart. I got Cardello, and I'm ready to take my medicine."

Policeman Rafferty bit a generous chew from his plug of tobacco.

"You Eye-talians," he remarked reflectively, "are a nutty bunch."

IV.

THE COURT ROOM was crowded. Guisseppi's strange story had been spread to the four winds by the newspapers, and everybody was eager to see this man who had passed through the mystic portals of death.

"My client will plead guilty to the Cardello murder," said Guisseppi's lawyer. "I take it your honor will agree with me that having paid the penalty of the law for his former crime, he can not again be hanged for that old offense."

"I do agree with you," replied the judge. "The sentence was that on a certain day at a certain hour, he be hanged by the neck until dead. This sentence was carried out. He was hanged. He was officially pronounced dead. It is not for me to say whether death was absolute. Perhaps a spark of life remained which was fanned back to full flame. Possibly his soul actually left the body and was recalled by some cryptic means we do not fully understand.

"But, whatever the truth, his return to life creates a unique situation. I know of no precedent of which the law ever has taken cognizance. So far as I know, this case is the first of its kind in history. Since the sentence pronounced upon this man has been carried out legally in every detail, it is my decision that he can not again be hanged for the crime for which he already has paid the penalty."

"There is one other point which your honor failed to consider," said Guisseppi's lawyer. "It is an axiom of law that a man can not, for the same crime, be placed in jeopardy twice. A man can be placed in no greater jeopardy than when, with a hangman's noose around his neck, he is dropped through the trapdoor of a gallows. So, whether Guisseppi was actually dead or whether a faint flicker of life remained, he is forever immune from further punishment for the crime for which he was placed in this great jeopardy."

"Your point may be well taken," replied the judge.

"Now, your honor, we come to the Cardello murder charge. It is at the prisoner's own desire and against my better judgment that I enter a plea of guilty and throw him upon the mercy of the court. There are perhaps some extenuating circumstances. But he is willing to take whatever punishment the court may see fit to inflict. In view of all the circumstances of this extraordinary case, I make a special plea for mercy."

"I will answer your plea," returned the judge, "by ordering the case stricken from the docket and the prisoner discharged from custody."

A murmur of amazement broke the tense hush of the crowded chamber. Guisseppi's lawyer gasped.

"Am I to understand, your honor—"

"This is not mercy but law," the judge continued. "This man is legally dead. He is without the pale of all law. A dead man can commit no crime. No provision in the whole range of jurisprudence recognizes the possibility of a dead man's committing a crime. No man, in the purview of the law, can return from the dead. If we assume that this man was dead, he will remain dead forever in the eyes of the law. If by a miracle he has returned to life and committed murder, there is no punishment within the scope of the statutes that can be decreed against him.

"He is the super-outlaw of all history. Forever beyond the reach of law, the statutes are powerless to deal with him or punish him in any way. If he should shoot down every member of the jury

that convicted him, if he should walk into court and kill the judge before whom his case was tried, the law could do nothing to him. He could spend his days as a bandit, robbing, plundering, murdering, and the law could not touch him. Legally he is a ghost, a shadow, an apparition, with no more reality than the beings in a dream. So far as the law is concerned, he does not exist. He can no more be imprisoned, hanged, punished or restricted in his actions than a phantom that exists only in the imagination."

"A most wonderful construction of the law," declared Guisseppi's attorney in happy bewilderment at the turn of events.

"It is less a construction of law as it exists than an admission there is no law applicable to a man legally dead yet actually alive, a man who under the law does not exist. This boy, physically alive but legally dead, has murdered a man with deliberate purpose and malice aforethought. There is no doubt about that. If the law recognized his existence, he should be hanged. Justice demands that he be executed. But he is in some fourth-dimensional legal state beyond the reach of justice. The law is powerless to deal with him. As the administrator of the law, my hands are tied. There is nothing left for me but to set him at liberty."

Despite the decision of the court that under the law he had no existence, Guisseppi left the chamber smiling and happy, acutely conscious of joyous life in every fibre of his being.

POLICEMAN RAFFERTY was filled with righteous anger when he learned that he could not collect the $1,000 reward. In answer to his indignant questions, he was told the reward was offered for the arrest of "the person or persons guilty of the murder of Cardello," and since Guisseppi was neither a person or anything else that the law recognized as existing, he was not guilty of the crime.

Moreover, it was hinted to him that in capturing Guisseppi, he had arrested nobody. In the end, Policeman Rafferty had to laugh in spite of himself.

"The money's mine, all right," he said philosophically. "Only I don't get it."

V.

ROSINA STEFANO sat alone in the little parlor of her home in one of the quaint side-streets of the Italian quarters, picturesque with its jumble of weather-stained frame dwellings and exotic little shops.

It was a chill, dreary night outside. A piping wind made fantastic noises about eaves and gables, and shook the windows as with ghostly hands. A lamp, burning under a blue shade, filled the chamber with eerie shadows. A coal fire was dying to embers in the open grate. There was a knock at the door.

"*Entre!*"

Guisseppi threw open the door and stood upon the threshold smiling.

"Rosina!"

The girl rose from her chair and stared fixedly at him out of frightened eyes. With a quick gesture, as if for protection against some supernatural menace, she made the sign of the cross.

"I have come back to you, Rosina." Guisseppi took a step toward her and threw open his arms.

Rosina shrank back.

"Do you not still love me?"

Her lips framed a "No" for answer in a terror-stricken whisper.

"Come, my little sweetheart, embrace me."

"No, no, Guisseppi!" Her voice was a tremulous cry. "You are dead!"

"Dead? Certainly I am not dead. I am alive and well, and I love you just as I always loved you."

"You are only a ghost."

"Don't be foolish, little one. Do I look like a ghost? Me? Come into my arms and see how strong they are. Lay your head on my breast and feel the beating of my heart. And every beat of my heart is for you."

Rosina stood motionless. There flashed through her mind old grewsome stories of vampires that lured their victims into their power with love traps and sucked their blood. Momentary horror froze her blood.

"O Guisseppi," she exclaimed, "why have you risen from the dead? Why do you come back to haunt me?"

"Poor girl, do not talk like that. I tell you I am alive—tingling to my finger tips with life and love for you. If I were dead, I should still love you. Death could not kill my love for you. Have you forgotten everything? I thought you loved me. You have often told me so. I believed you would always love me, be true to me forever. Now I find you changed and cold."

"I did love you, Guisseppi. To the depths of my being I loved you." Her words came in a passionate torrent in her liquid native tongue. "You were my earth and heaven, my life, my soul's salvation. All day my thoughts were of you. I dreamed of you at night. There was nothing I would not have done for you. There was nothing I would not have given you. I could have lived for you always. I could have died for you. Did I not come to see you every day in jail? Did I not bring you constantly dishes I had cooked myself with utmost care? Was not I close beside you in the court room every day of the long trial?

"I did everything to soothe and comfort you through all those terrible days. Was it nothing that I remained constant when you were locked in a cell condemned to death? I was true to the very trap-door of the hangman. What greater proof could a woman give of her love than to remain true to a man sentenced as a felon to the eternal disgrace of the gallows?"

She paused for a moment, erect, motionless, her face aflame, seemingly transfigured like the wonder woman of a vision.

"Ah, yes," she went on; "then there was no one like my Guisseppi; no eyes so bright, no lips so tender, no face so dear. You were my god. Can I ever forget the songs you used to sing to me in the happy days before 'Devil' Cardello crossed your life. Your voice was divine. Every note thrilled me. I loved it. To me it was the music of the stars. Nothing in all the world was so beautiful as your voice. But now your voice has changed. There is no longer any music in it. As you speak to me, it seems a voice from the sepulchre."

Guisseppi raised an arresting hand. He threw back his head. He smiled again.

"My voice has changed? Listen, *cara mia.*"

Slowly he began to sing an old Italian serenade. The ballad told of a knight of old who had bade a lily-white maid farewell and gone off to the wars and who, wounded and left for dead on the battlefield, was nursed back to life and returned to find his lady unchanged in her devotion against rivals and temptations.

Soft in the opening cadences, Guisseppi's voice grew in volume and power. It brought out in shades and nuances of wonderful beauty all the charm and romance of the ancient tale—the sadness of farewell, the clash of battle, the wounded soldier's dreams of his sweetheart as life seemed ebbing, the gladness of his homecoming, his happiness in reunited love.

Into the music, Guisseppi threw all the ardor and passion of his own love. There were notes like tears in his voice when, in minor strain, he sang the sorrows and dreams of the soldier; and the final crescendo passage, vivid with renewed love, was a burst of joyous melody straight from his heart.

"And you loved me still the same!" The words rose like incense from an altar. They fluttered about Rosina's ears like a shower of rose leaves.

The girl listened, spellbound. Never in happier days had she heard Guisseppi sing with such compelling sweetness. There seemed a new and wonderful quality in his voice. With his magical music, he was like a conjurer bending her spirit to his subtle enchantments.

On a golden cloud, she was transported to the sunny shores of Italy. A cavalier sang the serenade in the moonlight to his mandolin and, leaning from her latticed balcony, she dropped a rose to him. The bay of Naples spread its crinkled azure before her. Against the dark, star-spangled crystal of the night, sculptured Vesuvius upheld its canopy of smoke.

As the music steeped her senses, she fancied she could feel its golden filaments being drawn about her, binding her more and more closely in a fairy chain. As if under the charm of melodious hypnotism, her old love returned. All the tenderness and passion of her heart went out again to Guisseppi. The siren influence of his voice was transforming her. Her strength of will was crumbling. She stood swaying, helpless, her eyes glowing with rekindled love.

Suddenly the song ended. The spell was broken. Rosina passed a languid hand over her eyes as if to brush away a film of sleep. She seemed to wake from a trance. Guisseppi stood before her radiant, smiling.

"Now will you believe I am alive? Could a dead man sing like that?"

A look of awe overspread Rosina's face.

"You never sang like that before."

"This is the first time my life and happiness were ever at stake on a song."

"The Guisseppi I used to know could not sing like that. You are not Guisseppi. You are a spirit. Some demon has taught you how to sing so beautifully. You have come back with this new devil's voice of yours to lure my soul to hell."

"Ah, Rosina, how can you delude yourself with such foolish fancies. Do you not see me here solid in flesh and blood?"

"I see you, but I know you are only a shadow from the grave."

"If your eyes deceive you, your ears can not. You have heard me sing."

"That was some devil's necromancy."

Guisseppi fell on his knees before her and stretched out his arms in supplication.

"I love you, Rosina. That is all I can say. The hangman's noose was not able to strangle my love for you. Your love is more to me now than it ever was before. The world has turned cold to me. You are my only hope, my refuge. I need you. I want you with all my soul."

The girl shook her head sorrowfully. Her eyes rested upon him with sadness that was touched with renunciation.

"It can never be," she said firmly. "How you are here, I do not know. You are dead; of that I am sure. My love for you was buried in the grave that was dug for you. You are not the boy I once loved. You are something strange and different. I am afraid of you. It is only with horror that I could fancy the kisses of a dead man on my lips. The thought of a ghost's endearments fills me with loathing. Go back to the dead. I can love and reverence those who are gone, but there is no love anywhere in all the world for the dead returned from the grave."

She turned away and stood with her head bowed in her hands.

Slowly Guisseppi struggled to his feet. He staggered weakly against the wall and buried his face in his arms.

"And you, Rosina!" he sobbed.

This was the final, crushing blow. He felt now that he was indeed dead—dead at the grave of his lost love.

VI.

A TAXICAB stood in the narrow street near Rosina's home, its driver ready at the wheel, its engine purring. Behind the drawn blinds, sat Guisseppi, aflame with excitement, peering eagerly through the curtains from time to time.

Guisseppi was desperate. There was no place for the dead among the living. He had learned that clearly. As a "living dead man," all his experiences had been tragic. He regretted his resuscitation. He longed for the peace of the grave.

His old friends had fallen away from him. Many believed him a spirit damned, who, by some strange dispensation, was spared to life for yet a little while to make more exquisite the final agony reserved for him. Others were intelligent enough to know the truth, but even these were repelled by a certain unwholesomeness, a savor of the sepulchre, that seemed to cling about him.

The girls he had known in his old, gay days would have nothing to do with him. As handsome as ever, as romantic, with a voice as musical and appealing, he was in their imagination enveloped in an atmosphere of the charnel-house, and the curse of hell was branded on his brow.

His relatives held aloof. Between him and even his mother and father he was conscious that a thin shadow had gradually crept, and the tenderness of their love had been cooled by a ghostly fear of this eerie son who had been down among the dead and read with dead eyes the mysteries beyond the tomb.

He had been unable to find employment. It was as if every business house had up a sign, "No dead men need apply."

In despair and desperation, he fell into his old ways of banditry. He soon had placed to his record a long series of bold robberies. For several of his first lawless exploits, the police arrested him. But invariably the judges before whom he was arraigned set him at liberty.

So after a while the police refused to arrest him. What was the use? This ghost-man would only be set free again.

. . . While Guisseppi sat hidden from view behind the curtains of his taxicab, ruminating upon the bitterness of his fate, Rosina emerged from her home. Trim and dainty with pink cheeks and sparkling eyes, the young beauty was subtly suggestive of flowers and fragrance as she tripped along the street in the warm sunshine.

As she came abreast of the taxicab, Guisseppi stepped out, caught her in his arms, and swung her into the car. The girl's wild screams shrilled through the slumberous stillness of the quarter and filled the streets with excited throngs as the cab plunged madly forward, dashed around a corner and was soon lost to sight. In a distant part of the city, the car halted before a weather-stained building. Within the dingy doorway Guisseppi disappeared, bearing the kidnapped maiden in his arms.

A little later, Guisseppi appeared before the marriage license clerk in the city hall.

"I'm sorry," said the clerk, "but I can not give you a marriage license."

"Why not?"

"You are dead. You can not marry."

"But I'm *going* to marry!" shouted Guisseppi defiantly.

"Impossible. If I went through the formality of filling out a license for you, no minister or priest would perform the wedding service. The marriage altar, orange blossoms, the happiness of domestic love are not for the dead."

"But I'm *alive!* I am only *legally* dead."

The clerk smiled tolerantly. With a pencil he drew a circle on a sheet of paper.

(Continued on page 120)

A Gripping, Powerful Story by a Man Who Always Tells a Good Tale

The Blade of Vengeance

By George Warburton Lewis

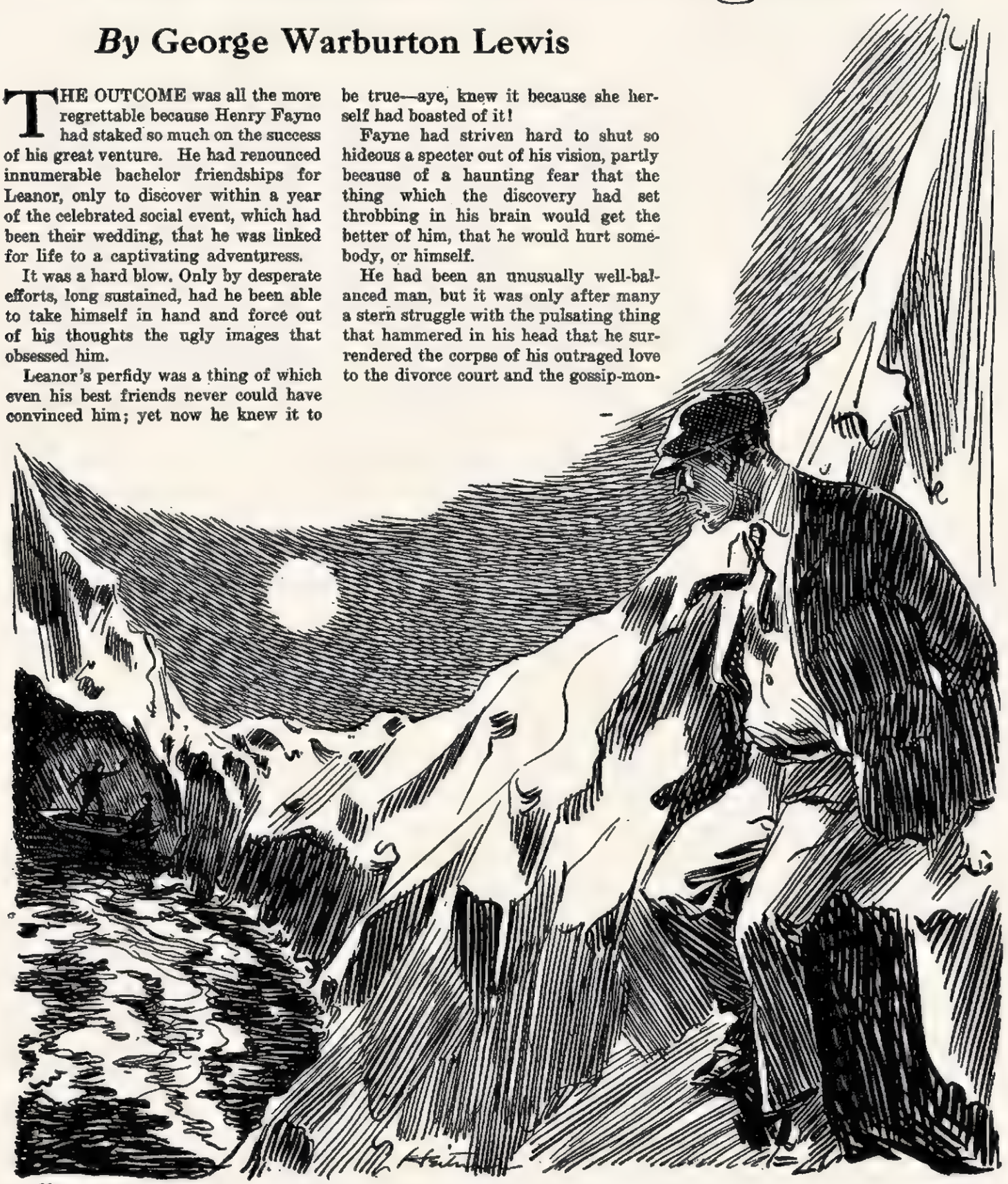
THE OUTCOME was all the more regrettable because Henry Fayne had staked so much on the success of his great venture. He had renounced innumerable bachelor friendships for Leanor, only to discover within a year of the celebrated social event, which had been their wedding, that he was linked for life to a captivating adventuress.

It was a hard blow. Only by desperate efforts, long sustained, had he been able to take himself in hand and force out of his thoughts the ugly images that obsessed him.

Leanor's perfidy was a thing of which even his best friends never could have convinced him; yet now he knew it to be true—aye, knew it because she herself had boasted of it!

Fayne had striven hard to shut so hideous a specter out of his vision, partly because of a haunting fear that the thing which the discovery had set throbbing in his brain would get the better of him, that he would hurt somebody, or himself.

He had been an unusually well-balanced man, but it was only after many a stern struggle with the pulsating thing that hammered in his head that he surrendered the corpse of his outraged love to the divorce court and the gossip-mon-



gers, and went sadly back to his bachelor haunts in the hope of forgetting. But he was appalled to find that he no longer fitted in.

The friends of the free and easy days of his celibacy were sincere enough in their pity for him, though in no way disposed to put themselves out seeking reclamation. In short, they might as well have said in chorus:

"You couldn't have expected us to forewarn you; you'd have quit us cold. You had to discover it for yourself, and the operation of finding out has simply rendered you impossible as one of the old crowd. Sorry, old man, but, after all, it's better that you should know."

So Henry Fayne brooded, lost his nerve, and then, all of a sudden—disappeared.

The old circle knew his set and cynical face no more. There were rumors of mental breakdown and suicide, and there was one report (little credited, however) that the unfortunate fellow had drifted down into the wilds of South America and become an eccentric and a recluse.

Leanor tired, in time, of the murderous velocity of her social chariot, dumped the winged vehicle on the trash-heap and went abroad, accompanied by a less rich and more ambitious retinue of high livers.

Like vari-colored butterflies, five years winged overhead, years by no means lacking in color and variety for Leanor. Exacting as were her tastes, she could scarcely have desired a more changeful, a more exquisitely exhilarating life.

Only once in a blue moon did she think of Henry. Thoughts of him, like all other memories of her meteoric past, had been crowded into oblivion by the inrush of the more intimate and actual.

Henry had been very good to her, she had to admit, but he had been none the less impossible. The outcome had been inevitable from the beginning. He was fifteen years her senior. She knew that she could never have held her volatile self down to a life of self-sacrifice and suffering with Henry. The idea was no less absurd than the mating of an esthetic humming-bird with some sedate old owl.

When she consented to marry Henry she had entertained no such preposterous thought as exacting of him a compliance with the ridiculously restricted code of ethics he subsequently set for her. Indeed, she would have grown old and ugly with nothing accomplished, unseeking and unsought. Too, there would have been lamentably fewer notches on her ivory fan than the half-decade last past had yielded.

As the wretched venture had turned out, however, she was still under thirty and was, to employ the homely simile of her latest masculine objective, "as pretty as a peach."

AT THE Pacific entrance of the Grand Canal, where the town of Bandora drowses like a sprawling lizard on the sun-baked clay, word went round that the millionaire adventuress was yachting down the west coast, homeward bound.

Everybody who read the public prints knew about Leanor, so at least one element at Bandora awaited her arrival with curious interest. And the curious were to be gratified, for since pretty Leanor habitually did the unexpected, she only proved her consistency when, upon her arrival, she capriciously decided to tarry a fortnight, with the two-fold object of having a look at the great waterway and exploring historic Batoga Island, only a couple of hours distant.

Should the mighty monument to engineering skill prove uninteresting, there remained the secret caves of Batoga, among them *La Guaca de San Pedro*, by allegation the identical haunted, bat-inhabited cavern in which buccaneering old Henry Morgan had once stored all of his ill-gotten gains and maybe imprisoned the unfortunate nuns captured at Porto Bello! And then, too, there was the celebrated Devil's Channel, which, according to widely circulated and much-believed stories, sucked small craft down into its omnivorous maw like some insatiable demon lying in wait.

Leanor devoted but little time to the prodigious engineering feat. After all, it was man-made, and what was man if not a purveyor to feminine caprices? Mere men were cheap. The adventuress knew, because she had bought and sold many of them. She had bartered the very souls of some.

She had bought them all with make-believe affection and disposed of them at a hundred per cent discount. She treated them much as one treats cast-off garments, experiencing only minor difficulties in disengaging herself from some of the more persistent.

A genuine Sybarite, Leanor's appetite for entities masculine had at last cloyed, and she now turned impatiently to inscrutable old Nature to make up the deficiency.

She went to Batoga, a verdant, mighty mountain, greenly shaggy, as yet unshorn by advancing civilization. It might have been a little separate world, set down by nature in a sleeping sea of sapphire. Here, indeed, was something different.

She was wild with delight as soon as her dainty feet touched the shell-paved beach. Really, this wonderland was too splendidly perfect to share with her unpoetic company of paid buffoons! She sent the whole lot of them bagging back to Bandora, decided to employ a guide, a boatman, or a native maid, contingent upon her special needs, right on the ground.

It was due to this whim of Leanor's that I myself wandered into the cast, came to know Leanor and likewise the story I am telling you here. I had just come through a notably obstinate case of dengue in the sanitarium. My thin knees, in fact, were still somewhat wobbly, and I was urging them back to normal by means of a leisurely stroll across the rolling pasture-land. On a grassy, wind-swept hillside I came all unexpectedly upon Leanor.

Evidently she had thought to refresh her jaded wits by a revel in wild flowers. She was seated on a shelf of rock that rimmed the hill-crown, culling unworthy floral specimens. A single upward glance, and then her eyes dropped back to her flowers in a world-bored manner which I somehow felt a quick impulse to resent. At least I could annoy her. That was any fool's privilege.

"Gathering flowers?" I interrogated, just as though that fact were not as obvious as the blue sky itself.

For answer, my front-line fortifications were instantly swept by an ocular onslaught well calculated to obliterate. I smiled back engagingly at the source of the tempest.

"Some hill, this," I suggested, emitting a windy sigh after the exertion of its ascent.

And then I saw that my second drive had broken through her first-line trench on a front of about a quarter of an inch. Disdain died slowly out of her face—a face still unaccountably fresh and girlish—and something like pity at my apparent lack of sophistication took its place.

"You really think it a high hill?" she asked, faintly smiling and gazing at me steadily as though she doubted my sanity.

I noted that her hazel eyes seemed to swim in seas of a wonderfully sparkling liquid.

"Well," I qualified, affecting funereal gravity, "it's higher than *some* hills."

Her amused smile expanded perceptibly.

"Really, now, have you ever seen very many hills?"

"N-no," I reluctantly confessed, "not so *very* many."

"What induced you to measure this one?"

"Well, I was shadowing somebody," I said quietly. At last she had given me an opening.

"Whom, pray?" she demanded, her smile brightening expectantly.

"*You*—if you don't mind," I announced.

"*Me!*" She laughed deliriously for a moment.

"It's hardly a laughing matter," I said, with forced seriousness when she was still. "I've been working on this case for years."

She sobered with a suddenness that suggested ugly thoughts, perchance remembering something of her kaleidoscopic past. The hazel eyes saddened a little. It was evident that she was rummaging among happenings which it gave her small pleasure to review. I waited. Maybe I was not quite the yokel she had thought me.

"Do you mean you're a detective?" she presently asked.

"I mean just that, madam," I said evenly.

"By whom are you employed?" she questioned tentatively.

"By Henry Fayne," I casually replied.

"That is the lie of an impostor," quickly asserted the woman; "Henry Fayne is dead."

She rose from the stone shelf and prepared to desert me. Anyhow, I had won my point. I had succeeded in annoying her.

But I concluded I could hardly let the matter so end, even as affecting a woman like Leanor. Nobody can afford to be openly rude.

"Wait," I said; "let's be good sportsmen. You tilted at me and I retaliated. Honors are even. Why not forget it?"

She was greatly relieved; and besides, forgetfulness, of all things, was what she sought. After a moment, deep wells of laughter again glistened in her splendid eyes. These and the smiling young mouth somehow seemed to give the lie to the fiasco she had made of life. What a pity, I thought, that she had chosen to fritter away her life in this fatuous, futile fashion.

I had thought that I should feel only contempt for such a woman as Leanor, but as we walked down the hill she told me something that penetrated a hitherto unknown weak spot in my armor. So I all but pitied the woman I had prepared to despise.

As if to take strength from them, she kept her eyes on the wild flowers she had gathered, as she pronounced the well-nigh unbelievable words I now set down.

The craze for the blinding white lights, and the delusion of equally white wines, were surfeited. The gilt and tinsel of the truly tawdry had palled. The mask of allurement had fallen from the forbidding face of the artificial and empty. Life itself had become for Leanor a vacant and meaningless thing. She had seen too much of it in too brief a space.

She concluded with a seeming contradiction, a veiled regret that her frenzied explorations had exhausted all too soon the world's meager store of things worth while, and there was a bitterness in her voice which contrasted unpleasantly with her youth and beauty as she said plainly, though with little visible emotion, that she had reached a point where life itself often repelled and nauseated her.

We had reached the sanitarium by this time, an interruption not unwelcome in the circumstances, and I left the strange woman alone with her tardy regrets and sought my own quarters, sympathetic and depressed, yet thanking my lucky stars for the happy dispensation that had made me an adventurer instead of an "adventuress."

That evening, Leanor and I planned a trip to Devil's Channel, and I strolled down to the beach in search of such a shallow-draught *cayuco* as could maneuver its way over the reefs that barred larger craft. *Boteros* of divers nationalities abounded, and among the many my questioning gaze finally met that of a vagabondish-looking fellow countryman in a frayed sailor garb. In odd contrast to his raiment, and swinging from his belt in a sheath which his short coat for an instant did not quite conceal, I caught a single glimpse of a heavy hunting knife with an ornamented stag-horn handle.

His name was Sisson, he told me, but he spoke Spanish like a native. His uncarded beard was a thing long forgotten of razors. He was unmistakably another of those easily identified tramps of the tropics who, in an unguarded moment, unaccountably lose their grip on themselves and thenceforward go sliding unresistingly down to a not unwelcome oblivion.

Sisson did not importune me, as did all the other boatmen; he did not even offer me his services; and it was because of this evidence of some lingering vestige of pride, coupled with the fact that he had an eminently suitable *cayuco*, that I decided to employ him.

AT THE narrow gateway of Devil's Channel the water is so shallow, and there so frequently occur tiny submerged sand-bars, that only the minutest of sea craft can skim over the gleaming rifts and gain entrance. This was confirmed for the nth time when I felt the specially made keel of our tiny *cayuco* scrape the shiny sand in warning that we were at last entering the canyon-like waterway.

Leanor and I were both plying our splendid oarsman with well-nigh every imaginable question about the gloomy, spooky-looking channel before us.

"Aren't we nearing *the place* yet?" Leanor presently asked.

"Farther in," drawled Sisson, the bearded giant of a boatman, glancing carelessly at the ascending cliffs on either side.

Twisting my body round in the wee native *cayuco*, I noted that the perpendicular walls of the shadowy strait that lay before us seemed drawing together with every pull of Sisson's great arms. Leanor's pretty face was radiant with expectation. Though bored of the world, there was at least one more thrill for her ahead.

Five minutes slipped by. Sisson rowed on steadily.

"There she is!" the boatman said suddenly, for the first time evincing something like a normal human interest in life. One of his huge, hairy hands was indicating an alkali spot on the face of the right-hand wall a stone's throw ahead. "Just opposite that white spot is where *it always happens.*"

He released his oars and let them trail in the still water. It looked peculiarly lifeless. Our small shell gradually slowed.

"Seems to be all smooth sailing here today, though," I ventured.

"Overrated, for the benefit of tourists," opined Sisson. "The water's eaten out a little tunnel under the west wall, but there's no real danger if you know the chart."

"How many did you say were drowned when that launch went down?" again asked Leanor. Her great dark eyes were sparkling again now with a keen new interest in life—or was it the nearness to potential death?

"Eleven," drawled Sisson. "The engineer jumped for it and made a landing on that bench of slate over there, and right there"—he smiled reminiscently—"he sat for seventy-two hours, with 'water, water everywhere, nor any drop'—"

"And is it true that none of the life-preservers they were putting on when the launch sank was ever found?" Leanor also wanted to know.

"True enough," said Sisson, "but that's not unnatural. Drowning men lay hold of whatever they can and never, *never* turn loose. Why, I've seen the clawlike fingers of skeletons locked around sticks that wouldn't bear up a cockroach!"

"Did you say it was a relatively calm day?" I questioned the boatman idly.

"Sure. Calm as it is right now," he answered.

I observed casually that the oarsman was gazing fixedly at Leanor. Even on him, perhaps, beauty was not entirely lost. Doubtless, too, he had heard the gossip her arrival had set going along the wharves at Batoga. Meanwhile Leanor had made a discovery.

"Why, we're still making headway!" she broke out suddenly. "I—I thought we had stopped."

Sisson glanced down at the water, and his tanned brow broke up in vertical wrinkles of consternation. The look in his deepset eyes, though, did not, oddly enough, seem to match the perplexity written on his corrugated brow.

Our craft was sliding rapidly forward as though propelled by the oars. The phenomenon was due to a current; that much was certain, for we were moving with a flotsam of dead leaves and seaweed.

Again I screwed my body half round in the cramped bow and shot a glance ahead. God! we were shooting toward the dread spot on the alkali cliff as though drawn to it by an unseen magnet. I could see, too, that our speed was rapidly increasing.

Sisson snatched up the trailing oars and put his giant's strength against the invisible something that seemed dragging us by the keel, but all he did was to plough two futile furrows in the strange whirlpool. Our *capuco* glided on.

The *blasé* adventuress was never more beautiful. For the time, at least, life, warm and pulsating, had come back and clasped her in a joyous embrace. Her lips were parted in a smile of seemingly inexpressible delight. There was not the remotest suggestion of surprise or fear in her girlish face.

She put her helm over only when I shouted to her in wide-eyed alarm, but the keen, finlike keel of our specially built *cayuco* obviously did not respond. Oblique in the channel, we slithered over, ever nearer to the west wall, the unseen agent of destruction towing us with awful certainty toward the vortex. Still the surface of the water, moving with us, looked as motionless as a mill-pond! It was uncanny, nothing less.

I peered into the bluishly transparent depths, fascinated with wonder, and then, of a sudden, I saw that which alone might prove our salvation. Apparently we were in a writhing, powerful current, racing atop the seemingly placid undersea or sub-surface waters of the channel. I could make out many small objects spinning merrily about as they flew, submerging, toward the whirlpool.

We carried six life-belts. Two of these I snatched from their fastenings, slipped one about Leanor, and with the other but partly adjusted—for there remained no time—myself plunged out of our—as it were—bewitched craft in the direction of the west wall.

To my surprise I swam easily. When I made a deep stroke, however, I could feel strange suctorial forces tugging at my finger-tips. But for the moment I was safe.

I glanced about to see if Leanor had followed my lead. She was not in the water. I turned on my back and saw, to my utter amazement, that neither she nor Sisson had left the *cayuco*.

This was unaccountable indeed. And it was now clear that it was too late for them to jump, for the light boat had already begun to spin round in a circle at a point exactly opposite the alkali spot! Faster and faster it flew, the diameter of the ring in which it raced swiftly narrowing.

As I swam, my shoulder collided with some obstruction. It was the west wall. I clambered up a couple of feet and sat dripping on a slime-covered shelf of slate, the identical slab on which the engineer of the sunken launch had thirsted.

I was powerless to help my companions. I could only sit and stare in near unbelief. Why—*Why* had they not abandoned the tiny craft with me? I saw now that neither had even so much as got hold of a life-belt. Why—?

My God! What was this I beheld? Sisson had advanced to the stern of the flying cockleshell where Leanor still sat motionless, unexcited, smiling. The charmed look of expectancy was still in her perfect face.

Sisson's voice, suddenly risen high, chilled me to the marrow. It might have been the voice of some martyr on the scaffold. He did not reveal his identity to Leanor. It was not necessary. Something—I dare not say what—enabled her in that awful moment of tragedy to know *her divorced husband.*

THE EXQUISITE torture of recollection had shriveled Henry Fayne's mentality and left him a semi-maniac, yet here, after all the cynical, embittering years was the physical, the carnate Henry Fayne, the long-discarded plaything of feminine caprice. His suffering was fearfully recorded in the seamed and bearded mask of his altered features.

The smile did not leave Leanor's face. The madman's voice rose in a shrill, terrible cry. He babbled and sputtered in consuming rage, but I caught the current of his wild harangue. He had waited all the years for this opportunity; he had followed her from Bandora, had laid all his plans with infinite nicety to avenge the wreck which Leanor had made of his life.

But the woman laughed defiantly, tensely; laughed derisively, full in the bearded face.

"You have waited too long, Henry," she said, evenly yet with a note of triumph in her tone; "I've worn threadbare every allurement of life. Today I came here seeking my last adventure—a sensation at once new and ultimate—*death!*"

It was here that the miracle supervened.

Chagrin, fierce and awful, distorted the hairy vagabond's face, and, balancing himself precariously in the crazily whirling dugout, he raised a great clenched fist. I once had seen a laughing man struck by lightning. As the rending voltage shot through him the muscles of his face had relaxed slowly, queerly, as if from incredulity, just as the furious, drawn face of Henry Fayne relaxed now. The menacing fist unclinched and fell limply at his side.

Of all the examples of thwarted vengeance I had ever seen on the stage, or off, this episode from real life was the most dramatic.

The boat had circled swiftly in to the center of the vortex and now spun crazily for a moment as though on a fixed pivot, like a weather-vane. Then it capriciously resumed its first tactics, only it now raced inversely in a rapidly widening circle, running well down in the water, as though from some powerful submarine attraction.

That the spurious boatman was a victim of some hopeless form of insanity I was certain when I saw him drop to his knees and extend both his great hands in evident entreaty to the woman who had stripped him of his honor and, driven him, a driveling idio-maniac, into exile. Leanor sat impassive, but the madman continued to supplicate.

Never did my credulity undergo so mighty a strain as when, after a moment, the woman reached out and locked her slim hands in his. It was a strange picture, believe me! From my uncertain perch on the slimy ledge of slate, I stared, thrilling deep in my being at this futile truce on the brink of eternity.

Its revolutions greatly widened and its speed diminished, the tiny boat suddenly swerved from its circular course, bobbed upward as though a great weight had been detached from its keel and then drifted like some spent thing of life toward the west wall, where I crouched dumbfounded, my breath hissing in my nostrils, my lungs heaving.

Only now am I coming to the crux of this story of which the foregoing forms a necessary prelude.

Back at Batoga that same night, in an obscure corner of the wide cool porch of the palm-environed sanitarium, Henry Fayne and Leanor, after a long heart-to-heart talk alone, agreed to forgive and forget. Later in the evening Fayne went down to the contiguous village to assemble his meager belongings. They would be interesting souvenirs with which to decorate the walls of the rehabilitated home. I found Leanor sitting where he had left her on the porch, smiling enigmatically.

"Can I act, or not?" she asked me rather abruptly as I came up.

"Act?" I groped; "what do you mean?"

She sat there, smiling mysteriously in the white moonlight, until I at length prevailed upon her to pour into my incredulous ears how it had flashed upon her, in the crucial moment at the whirlpool, that she must convince Fayne that to destroy one who seeks death would give no satisfaction to a seeker after vengeance. She had made him see that the most effective way of wreaking his revenge would be to prevent her taking her own life and force her to live with him again as in the old days. What, indeed, could be greater punishment than that?

So once again the wily adventuress had tricked poor Henry Fayne. It had been a close thing, but her lightning wits had saved her to look forward enchantedly to the prospect of other adventures. Though she had, in fact, tired of life, she had weakened before death; yet the fortitude of skillful artifice underlying that physical fear bespoke such a resourcefulness as I had never before seen in any woman.

She had spoken more truth than she knew when she said that Henry Fayne was dead, for, mentally, he no longer existed.

But Leanor had one more card to play. When she had outlined her campaign, I sat aghast at the frank inhumanity of her plans for the morrow. She had already made arrangements with the native officials of the nearby village. She was to appear in court and testify, and I was to be summoned to give evidence before the committing judge. Henry Fayne was to be ruthlessly chucked into the Acorn Insane Asylum!

After Leanor had retired to her apartment I lingered a while in the fragrant night to smoke a cigar and meditate, for I was badly upset by her pitiless resolve. As I sat reviewing the strange events of the day, the dark figure of a man, half bent and retreating rapidly among the dappled shadows of the palms, startled me unpleasantly.

At my first glimpse of the skulker, some sixth sense told me that he had been eavesdropping Leanor and me from under the elevated porch on which I sat. As soon as the flitting shadow had melted into the gloom I slipped off the porch and investigated.

My half-formed suspicion was confirmed. The eavesdropper's footprints were quite distinct. He had crouched directly under the chairs which the adventuress and I had occupied.

I did not retire until an hour later. An indescribable feeling of dread had, though for no adequate reason, begun to weigh upon my spirits and to nag my nerves.

The first faint glimmer of dawn was in the east when something touched me softly on the shoulder. I remembered that I had left my porch window open, and sprang up in a sudden flurry of alarm, but my nerves slackened quickly when the intruder, a black Jamaican, showed me his watchman's badge.

The old negro was afraid something had happened. He had heard stealthy footfalls upstairs, and somebody's bedroom door was wide open. On looking into the room he had seen—!

But at this point in his story he choked, overcome. He was an excitable and superstitious old black at best, but now he was fairly beside himself with a terror for which he had no explanation. The occupant of the room, I surmised, had gone out on the porch, properly enough, to smoke an early morning cigar. But the old watchman would not be reassured until I consented to accompany him up to the second floor.

I noted, as we advanced along the corridor, that a door stood ajar. I tapped tentatively. No answer. I repeated the summons, louder. Still no answer. I walked in.

The moonlight that flooded the porch outside filtered in, subdued, through the lace-curtained windows. It revealed a bed. In the the center of the bed was the figure of a woman—all in snow white save a single dark-hued covering of some sort which sprawled across the full bosom.

A nameless something made me fumble rather hurriedly for the electric switch. The bright light showed what I had dreaded, almost expected. The dark-colored garment was not a garment at all. It was blood.

It dyed the white bosom repellently and, still welling from its fountain, was fast forming a ragged little pool on the bedcovering. Fair over the victim's heart, the ornamented stag-horn handle of a heavy hunting-knife, none of the blade visible, stood up like a sinister monument, somehow increasingly familiar to my gaze; and after an instant's reflection I could have sworn—so plainly did my eyes visualize the motive for this horror—that I beheld a single word scrawled in crimson along the mottled staghorn handle:

"VENGEANCE!"

Air Transportation Between Chicago and New York To Be Established

CHICAGOANS will soon be able to run down to New York on business early one morning and be back home in time for breakfast the next day, if the plans for dirigible service between the two cities carry through. A number of prominent Americans are members of a corporation that is building several huge, helium-filled balloons in the Schutte-Lanz Company's plant in Germany, according to Benedict Crowell, former secretary of war, who is the president of the new corporation. The airships will carry passengers and freight, it was announced.

It Was a Frightful, Incredible Thing, Found in the Amazon Valley

THE GRAY DEATH

By LOUAL B. SUGARMAN

UNWAVERINGLY, my guest sustained my perplexed and angry stare. Silently, he withstood the battering words I launched at him.

He appeared quite unmoved by my reproaches, save for a dull red flush that crept up and flooded his face, as now and then I grew particularly bitter and biting in my tirade.

At length I ceased. It was like hitting into a mass of feathers—there was no resistance to my blows. He had made no attempt to justify himself. After a momentous silence, he spoke his first word since we had entered the room.

"I'm sorry, my friend; more sorry than you can imagine, but—I couldn't help it. I simply could not touch her hand. The shock—so suddenly to come upon her—to see her as she was—I tell you, I forgot myself. Please convey to your wife my most abject apologies, will you? I am sorry, for I know I should have liked her very much. But—now I must go."

"You can't go out in this storm," I answered. "It's out of the question. I'm sorry, too; sorry that you acted as you did—and more than sorry that I spoke to you as I did, just now. But I was angry. Can you blame me? I'd been waiting for this moment ever since I heard from you that you had come back from the Amazon—the moment when you, my best friend, and my wife were to meet. And then—why, damn it, man, I can't understand it! To pull back, to shrink away as you did; even to refuse to take her hand or acknowledge the introduction! It was unbelievably rude. It hurt her, and it hurt me."

"I know it, and that is why I am so very sorry about it all. I can't excuse myself, but I can tell you a story that may explain."

I saw, however, that for some reason he was reluctant to talk.

"You need not," I said. "Let's drop the whole matter, and in the morning you can make your amends to Laura."

Anthony shook his head.

"It's not pleasant to talk about, but that was not my reason for hesitating. I was afraid you would not believe me if I did tell you. Sometimes truth strains one's credulity too much. But I will tell you. It may do me good to talk about it, and, anyhow, it will explain why I acted as I did.

"Your wife came in just after we entered. She had no yet removed her veil or gloves. They were gray. So was her dress. Her shoes—everything was gray. And she stood there, her hand outstretched—all in that color—a body covered with gray. I can't help shuddering. *I can't stand gray!* It's the color of death; Can your nerves stand the dark?"

I rose and switched off the lights. The room was plunged into darkness, save for the flicker of the flames in the fireplace and the intermittent flashes of lightning. The rain beat through the leafless branches outside with a monotonous, slithering *swish* and rattled like ghostly fingers against the windows.

"The light makes it hard to talk—of unbelievable things. One needs the darkness to hear of hell."

He paused. The *swir-r-r* of the rain crept into the stillness of the room. My companion sighed. The firelight shone on his face, which floated in the darkness—a disembodied face, grown suddenly haggard.

"A good night for this story, with the wind crying like a lost soul in the night. How I hate that sound! Ah, well!"

There was a moment of silence.

"It was not like this, though, that night when we started up the Amazon. No. Then it was warm and soft, and the stars seemed so near. The air was filled with scent of a thousand tropical blossoms. They grew rank on the shore.

"There were four of us—two natives, myself and Von Housmann. It is of him I am going to tell you. He was a German—and a good man. A great naturalist, and a true friend. He sucked the poison from my leg once, when a snake had bitten me. I thanked him and said I'd repay him some day. I did—sooner than I had thought— with a bullet! I could not bear to see him suffer."

The man sat there, gazing into the flames—and I listened to the dripping rain fingering the bare boughs and *tap-tap-tapping* on the roof above.

My friend looked up.

"I was seeing his face in the flames. God help him! . . . We had traveled for days—weeks—how long does not matter. We had camped and moved on; we had stopped to gather specimens—always deeper into that evil undergrowth. And as we moved on, Von Housmann and I grew close; one either grows to love or hate in such circumstances, and Sigmund was not the sort of man one would hate. I tell you, I loved that man!

"One day we struck into a new place. We had long before left the tracks of other expeditions. We *trekked* along, unmindful of the exotic beauty of our surroundings, when I saw our native, who was up ahead, stop short and sniff the air.

"We stopped, too, and then I noticed what the keener, more primitive sense of our guide had detected first."

"IT WAS an odor. A strange odor, indefinable and sickening. It was filled with foreboding—evil. It smelt—*gray!* I can not describe it any other way. It smelt dead. It made me think of decay—decay, and mould and—ugly things. I shuddered. I looked at Von Housmann, and I saw that he, too, had noticed it.

" 'What is that smell?' I asked.

"He shook his head.

" 'Ach, dot iss new. I haf not smelled it before. But—I do not lige it. It iss not goot. Smells is goot or bat—und dot is not goot. I say, I do not lige dot smell.'

"Neither did I. We went ahead, cautiously now. A curious sense pervaded the air. It puzzled me. Then it struck me: *silence.* Silence, as though the music of the spheres had suddenly been snuffed out. It was the utter cessation of the interminable chirping and chattering of the birds and monkeys and other small animals.

"We had become so accustomed to that multitudinous babel that is absence

was disturbing. It was—eerie. Yes, that's the word. It made that first impression of lifelessness more intense. Not death, you understand. Even death has in it a thought of life, an element of being. But this was just—lifelessness.

"The gray odor had become so strong it was wellnigh unbearable. Then we saw our guides running back to us. They rebelled. They refused to go beyond the line of trees ahead. They said it was *tabu*.

"That ended it. No promise, no threat, nothing would move them. Do you know what a savage's *tabu* is? It is stronger than death. And this place was *tabu*. So we left them there with our stuff, and Sigmund and I went on alone. We reached the farthest line of trees and stopped on the edge of a clearing.

"I can't describe that sight to you. But I can see it—good God, how I can still see it! Sometimes I wake up in the night with that nightmarish picture in my eyes, and my nostrils filled with that ghoulish stench.

"It was a field of gray; almost, I might have said, a field of *living* gray. And yet, it did not give the impression of life. It moved, although there was not a breath of wind; not a leaf on the trees quivered, but that mass of gray wiggled and crawled and undulated as though it were a huge gray shroud that was thrown over some monstrous jelly-like Thing.

"And that Thing was writhing and twisting. The gray mass extended as far as I could see ahead; to the right the sandy shore of the river stopped it; and to the left and in front of us it terminated at a distance of a few yards away from the trees where a belt of sand intervened.

"I don't know how long we stood there, my friend Von Housmann and I. It fascinated us. At last he spoke.

"'*Heilige Mütter. Was kommt da?* Vat in der name off all dot iss holy do you call dot? Nefer haf I seen such before. Eferyvere I haf traffeled, but nefer haf I seen a sight lige dot. I tell you, it makes my flesh crawl!'

"'It makes me sick to look at it,' I answered. 'It looks like—like living corruption.'

"The old German shook his head. He was baffled. We knew we were looking upon something that no living mortal had ever gazed upon before. And our flesh crawled, as we watched that Thing writhing beneath its blanket of gray.

"We walked slowly and cautiously across the strip of sand to the edge of the gray patch. As I bent over, the pungency of the odor bit into the membrane of my nostrils like an acid, and my eyes smarted.

"And then I saw something that drove all other thoughts from my mind. The mass was a mosslike growth of tiny gray fungi. They were shaped like miniature mushrooms, but out of the top of each grew a countless number of antennae that twisted and writhed around ceaselessly in the air.

"They seemed to be feeling and groping around for something, and it was this incessant movement that gave to the patch that quivering undulation which I had noticed before. I stared until my eyes ached.

"'What do you make of it,' I asked my friend.

"'*Ach*, I do not know. It iss incomprehensible. I haf nefer seen such a—a t'ing in my whole, long life. It iss, I should say, some sort off a fungoid growt'. Ya, it iss clearly dot. But der species—um, dot iss *not* so clear. Und dose liddle feelers; on a fungus dot iss new. It iss unheard off. See, der *veddammte* t'ings iss lige lifting fingers; dey svay und tvist lige dey vas feeling for somet'ings, not? I am egseedingly curious. Und, I am baffled—und, my frient, I do not lige dot.'

"Impatiently, he reached out a stick he was carrying a newlycut, stout cudgel of dried wood. He stirred around with it in the growth at his feet. And then a cry broke from his lips.

"'*Ach, du lieber Gott—gnadig Gott im Himmel! Sieh' da!*'

"I looked where he was pointing. His hand trembled violently. And little wonder! The stick, for about twelve inches up, was a mass of gray!

"And as I watched, I saw, steadily growing before my eyes, that awful gray creep up and surround the wood. I'm not exaggerating; I tell you, in less time than it takes to tell, it had almost reached Von Housmann's hand. He threw it from him with an exclamation of horror.

"It fell in the gray growth and instantly vanished. It seemed to melt away."

"SIGMUND looked at me. He was pale. At last he sighed.

"'So-o-o! Ve learn. On vood it grows. I might haf guessed. Dot iss der reason dot no trees are here. It destroys dem. But so *schnell; ach*, lige fire it growed. My frendt, I lige dot stuff lesser *als* before. It is not healt'y. But vat vill it not eat?'

"I handed him my rifle. He took it, and with the muzzle poked the growth. Man, my hair fairly stood on end! Do you know anything about fungi? No? Well, I have never known or heard of any vegetable growth that would attack blue steel. But that stuff, I tell you, that rifle barrel sprouted a crop of that gray mass as readily and as quickly as had the wood!

"I grabbed the gun and lifted it out of the patch. Already several inches of steel had been eaten—literally *eaten*—off. I held it up and watched that damnable gray crawl along the barrel. It just seemed to melt the metal. It melted like sealing wax, and great gray flakes dropped off to the ground.

"Nearer and near it came; to the rear sight, the trigger-guard, the hammer. It was uncanny—like a dream. I stood there, paralyzed. I could not believe what my eyes told me was true. I looked at Sigmund. His mouth was open and his face was white as death. I laughed at his face. That seemed to tear away the mist. He yelled and pointed, and I looked down.

"Not two inches from my hand was that mass. I could see those feelers reaching out toward my hand and I was sick. Instinctively, I threw the gun from me; aimlessly, blindly. It fell on the sand belt outside the gray mass.

"Hardly had it struck the sand before the growth had reached the butt, and then there was nothing to be seen but a tiny patch of that gray, poisonous Thing. And as we looked, it began to melt. Gradually, steadily, it was disappearing.

"'Quick, quick,' shouted Von Housmann, and we ran over to the spot. By bending over, we could see what was happening.

"The feelers, or antennae, which we had noticed before, had vanished, but instead, at the bases of each individual plant, were similar tendrils. But more of them—thousands and thousands of them all feeling and groping frantically about. And as they swayed and twisted and brushed the sand, one by one they shriveled up and seemed to withdraw into the parent body.

"And gradually this nucleus itself shrank and withered, until it was no more than a tiny gray speck on the sand. Soon that was all that was left; a lot of tiny whitish particles, much lighter in color than the original plant, scattered around on the sand.

"I looked at Von Housmann, and he looked at me. After a long interval, he spoke. He spoke slowly, almost as though it were a painful effort.

"'Ant'ony, ve haf seen a—miracle. From vat, or how, or ven, dot hell-growt' sprang, I do not know. I do not know how many, many years it has stood here; may be it has been for centuries.

But I do know this: if dot sand was not here—vell, I shudder to t'ink off vat vould be today.'

"I stared.

"'You do not understand? *Ach,* so! You haf vat happened to dot stick? Und to dot gun of steel? So! Look, now.'

"He took off his hat and went over to the border of the patch. He touched—just barely touched the brim of the hat to the gray matter and held it up. Already a growth was moving up the linen. He nodded, then threw it away, onto the sand. Speechless, we watched it fade away under the merciless attack of that horrible stuff, and then, in turn, the gray fungoid growth wither and disappear.

"'Now do you understand? Do you see vat I meant? Vood, steel, linen—eferyt'ing vat it touches it *eats.* It grows fast—like flame in dry sticks. All-consuming. Aber—*siest du*—dot sand—ven it touched dot, it died. It starved. Und see! Look close—more closer still at dot sand. Do you see anything odd about it?'

"I shook my head. It looked very fine and light, but I could not see anything unusual.

"'No? Iss it not glass, dot sand? Look at it und at der sand vere dot T'ing has not been, and see if it is not so different.'

"I picked up some sand from under my foot. And then I saw what *he* had seen at once. The sand in my hand was coarser, dirtier—in short, like any fine-grained sand you may have seen. But the sand where the Grey had fallen was clear, glasslike. It was almost transparent, and I saw that what was there was a mass of silicon particles. I nodded.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I see now. That stuff has eaten out every particle of mineral, of dirt and dust, but not the silicon!

"'Egsactly! Und dot iss vat has safed us from—Gott only knows vot! I do not know what dot stuff vill eat, but I *do* know it vill not eat silicon. Vy? *I* do not know. Dot iss yet a mystery. So—it starts,—*ach,* dot too, I do not know—but it starts somewhere. Und it eats und grows, und grows and eats, and eferyt'ing vot it touches it consumes—egcept sand. Sand stops it.

"'It eats out der stuff in der sand, but not der silica, und starves and dies. It is a miracle. If der sand vas not here—*ach, Gott!*—it vould keep on going until—vell—I do not know! I haf nefer seen dot before. I am intrigued, und I am going to take dot stuff—oh, only a liddle bit—und I shall not rest until I haf learned something about it. Und, because I haf seen it does not lige sand, I vill make for it a cage—a liddle box of glass, und study it lige it vas a bug. Not?'

"We returned to where our natives still stood woth our packs. We quickly fitted together some microscopic slides into a rough box and bound it about with string. With it, we returned to the edge of the gray patch. Von Housmann knelt down and carefully scooped up a bit of the fungus with a glass spatula he had brought along. He dumped this into his box and waited. In five minutes it had disappeared. He looked up blankly.

"'You forgot, Sigmund,' I said, smiling at his woeful expression. 'It starves on silicon. It won't live in glass.'

"'*Ach. Dumkopf!* Of course! I haf forgot dot. But, ve vill fool dot hell-plant. He goes yet on hunger-strike-no? Ve try now dot forcible feeding.'

"He took out his knife and cut from a near-by tree several small splinters.

"'Ve vill feed him, so. Dot vood, it vill be for him a greadt feast, und he shall eat und eat, und we vill study him und see vot we vill see.'

"Laughing, he bent over and shook out the tiny gray residue which was in the box. He dropped in a sliver of wood and was bending over to refill his box when I felt a sting on my foot. I looked down, and my heart stood still.

"On my shoe, just in between the laces, was a spot of gray. I could not move. I was cold. I can not describe how I felt, but I seemed turned to stone. My flesh quivered and shrank and I was sick—very sick. Sigmund looked up, startled, and then he looked at my feet.

"The next thing I knew I was on my back, my foot in his hand. One slash of his knife across the thongs which laced my boot, and he jerked it off.

"The biting grew worse. I heard him gasp, and then I felt a sharp pain. My head swam and I must have fainted. I regained consciousness—I don't know how soon after—and I found myself back under the trees. I looked at my foot, which was throbbing and burning like fire. It was swathed in a bandage that Von Housmann had taken from his emergency kit and was wrapping around the instep. It was deeply stained with blood. I moved, and he looked up. He smiled when he saw I was conscious.

"'Dot was a close shave—yes? It had just eaten into der shoe as I pulled it off und one spot—lige a bencil dot—on your skin vas gray. So I cut it out and all around it, und so you haf a hole in your foot, but—you haf your foot. Now so! You lie here, und I get der niggers and ve take you to bed.'

"A tent was soon erected and I was carried into it. For two days I lay there, delirious half the time. Sigmund never left my side. He even slept there. He was insistent that it was his fault. He said one of the apparently dead fungi had dropped on my shoe and had revived there. That is, the plant, instead of dying, had shriveled up, but the life-nucleus was still strong. I shudder even now when I think of what might have been.

"At the end of the third day I was able to hobble about a little with the aid of a cane. That afternoon Sigmund came to me and asked if I would care to go with him to fill his little glass box. I refused, and he laughed. It was the last time I ever heard him laugh. I begged him to leave that stuff alone.

"Still laughing, he made some light reply and left me. I lay in my cot. I was filled with forebodings. The heat was intense, and I must have dropped off to sleep. I dreamed horrible, troublesome, weird dreams. I awoke, bathed in a cold sweat. I felt sure something was wrong, that some one was calling for me. I got to my feet and left my tent. No one was in sight. I tried to laugh at my premonition. I bitterly regretted that I had allowed my friend to override my persuasions.

"Hurrying as much as was possible, I started toward the clearing. My wound throbbed and ached. It tortured me. I seemed weighed down. Once I stumbled in my eagerness. It was horrible. Like a nightmare.

"I must have covered half the distance when I heard a scream. What a shriek it was! I wake up nights even now hearing it. It was unrecognizable. Like some unearthly animal. Just that one scream. My stick hindered me. I threw it away and ran.

"My blood was cold in my veins, but I felt not one twinge of pain in my *foot.* At last I came to the edge of the clearing. And there—God, it makes me sick even now to think of it."

THE SPEAKER paused; his face was chalky, and he shuddered and buried his face in his hands. I think he was crying.

Outside, the wind still howled, dully, monotonously, eerily. Sometimes it would shriek and scream. Then my friend's voice again—level, dead, cold.

"I looked out; I saw Sigmund standing on the sand. I can see him as plainly as though he were here now. His face was ashen. He was looking down. At his feet were the fragments of the glass box he had made.

"He was holding out his hands, looking at them. They were gray. And they writhed and twisted, but his arms were still. He was not even trembling. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and my throat was dry—but at last I called to him.

" 'Sigmund—Sigmund!' I cried. 'For God's sake—'

"He looked up, and, I tell you, I never want to see such a face again! I can never forget it. The face of a soul in torture. He looked at me and held out his arms. His hands were gone—flaked off in large, gray, writhing drops to the sand at his feet!

"He tried to smile, but couldn't.

"Another gray-Thing—dropped off. I was dizzy with sickness. It was unbelievable. And then he spoke. His voice was well-nigh unrecognizable. It croaked and broke:

" 'Done for, my friendt. I feel it eating to my heart. Be merciful and help me. *Shoot*—quick, through the forcheadt!'

"His words beat through the stupor clouding my brain, I started toward him—hands out-stretched. I could not speak.

" '*Um Gottes Willen, bleibt da!* Stop! Stop!'

"The words brought me up to a stop.

" 'Sigmund! My friend! What—?'

" 'Do not come near me! Vould you also be so tormented? Vat dot Gray touches it consumes. Do not argue, I say, but *shoot! Heilige Mutter!* Vy do you not shoot?'

"His voice rose into a shriek of agony. What was left of one arm had sloughed off—the other was almost gone. A little mound of gray grew larger at his feet. His flesh was consumed; skin, blood and bone, absorbed by that vile gray Thing, and he shrieked in agony and prayer. Both arms were gone, and the stuff at his feet had already begun to eat through his boots.

"I shot him—between his eyes. I saw him fall, and I fainted. When I came to, there was only a mound of tiny gray fungi, greedily reaching their hellish tentacles for sustenance and slowly shriveling up into tiny light gray specks of dust on a glossy patch of sand."

Savants No Longer Know All Things

"MEN in the business of knowing things have taken a tip from the plumbers, carpenters and plasterers," announced Friar McCollister, one of the University of Chicago literati. "No longer is it possible to go to a hoary old gentleman with a pile of books and a skull on his desk and ask him any question, from the date of the birth of Copernicus to the conjugations of the verb 'to know' in Sanscrit, and get an answer. The scholar nowadays has learned to say what the plumber says when you ask him to fix the hole he has made in the wall: 'That is not in my department.' I found this out the other day when I tried to get some information on the discovery of a human skull three million years old.

"First, I went to the information office of the University. There I encountered a sprightly young man who turned out to be a professor of sociology. But he didn't know anything about men three million years old. He only studied living men, he said. 'Better go over to Haskell Museum,' he told me. 'They have some skulls and mummies over there.'

"I ran up three flights of stairs and into a dusty old room where I saw a Dr. Edgerton. He was copying strange characters out of a book yellow with age. When I put my question he replied that the only ancients he knew were Egyptian mummies. He said I should see an anthropologist. Back to the information office to see where they kept the anthropologists.

"They sent me up to Walker Museum, where a bland young man said, 'Freddie Starr is not in, but you don't want an anthropologist, anyway. You want to see an ethnologist.'

"When I found one, after dogging him all over the campus, he told me that the matter really belonged in the department of geology. From there they sent me to see the department of paleontology. At last I located it in a cubby-hole of a museum which I didn't even know was there, although I have been on the campus three years.

" 'But, my dear sir,' replied the head of the department to my question, 'that is not in my department. What you want is a vertebrate paleontologist, and I am only a plain paleontologist. At present we have no vertebrate paleontologist at the University. The last one died a few years ago.'

"Well, I gave up my search," said Mr. McCollister. "This age of specialization is too much for me."

Ancient Legend Recalled When Misfortune Attends Tut's Discoverers

THERE is an old legend to the effect that whoever molests the final resting-place of a Pharaoh will be afflicted with the curse of the ancient rulers; and recent events have revived this superstition.

After thirty-three years of patient, ceaseless toil, Howard Carter, the now famous Egyptologist, discovered the tomb of a powerful Pharaoh. He was a very sincere man, and devoted to his life work all of his energy. Just when success and reward for his labor was within his grasp, he was stricken down with a baffling disease. His condition became very serious and physicians said that if he lived he would probably be an invalid for a long time. Shortly before Carter's illness, Lord Carnarvon, who was financing the expedition, and who was personally supervising the work, suddenly died.

Nobody seems to know just what killed him. Some attribute his death to the effects of an insect bite, some say that he was poisoned by some ancient death-potion with which he came in contact while in the tomb, and others declare that his death was the vengeance of King Tut-Ankh-Amen.

If such a legend could be credited anywhere, the Theban valley would be that place. By day nothing disturbs the place except the sound of the pick-axes and shovels of the native workmen. By night the stillness is broken only by the hooting of owls and the cries of jackals and wild-cats. The spectator is awed by the solemnity of the great, precipitous sandstone cliffs that stand sentinel on either side of the valley. In the midst of the silence and solitude one feels himself standing on the brink of two worlds, gazing into a vista of the unknown.

The Author of "Whispering Wires" Offers Another Thriller to WEIRD TALES Readers---

The Voice in the Fog

By HENRY LEVERAGE

THE *SERIPHUS* was a ten thousand ton, straight bow ocean tanker, and her history was the common one of Clyde-built ships—a voyage here and a passage there, charters by strange oil companies, petrol for Brazil, crude petroleum that went to Asia (for anointment purposes among the heathen) and once there was a hurried call to some unpronounceable Aegean port where the *Seriphus* acted against the Turks in their flare-up after the Great War.

The ordinary and usual—the up and down the trade routes—passed away from the *Seriphus* when Ezra Morgan, senior captain in the service of William Henningay and Son, took over the tanker and drove her bow into strange Eastern seas, loading with oil at California and discharging cargo in a hundred unknown ports.

Of Ezra Morgan it was said that he had the daring of a Norseman and the thrift of a Maine Yankee; he worked the *Seriphus* for everything the tanker could give William Henningay and Son; he ranted against the outlandish people of the Orient and traded with them, on the side, for all that he could gain for his own personal benefit.

Trading skippers and engineers with an inclination toward increasing wage by rum-running and smuggling were common in the Eastern service. Ezra Morgan's rival in that direction aboard the *Seriphus* ruled the engine-room and took pride in declaring that every passage was a gold mine for the skipper and himself.

The chief engineer of the *Seriphus* saw no glory in steam, save dollars; he mopped up oil to save money. His name was Paul Richter—a brutal-featured man given to boasting about his daughter, ashore, and what a lady he was making of her.

Paul Richter—whom Morgan hated and watched—was far too skilled in anything pertaining to steam and its ramifications to be removed from his position aboard the *Seriphus*. Henningay, Senior, believed in opposing forces on his many tankers—it led to rivalry and efficiency, instead of closeheadedness and scheming against owners.

The *Seriphus*, after a round passage to Laichau Bay, which is in the Gulf of Pechili, returned to San Francisco and was dry-docked near Oakland, for general overhauling.

Richter, after making an exact and detailed report to Henningay, Jr., visited the opera, banked certain money he had made on the round-passage, then went south to his daughter's home. He found trouble in the house; Hylda, his daughter, had a heart affair with a marine electrician, Gathright by name, a young man with a meager wage and unbounded ambition.

Through the Seven Seas, from the time of his Bavarian wife's death, from cancer of the breast, Richter, chief engineer of the *Seriphus*, had sweated, slaved, saved and smuggled contraband from port in order to say:

"This is my daughter! *Look at her!*"

Now, as Richter discovered, Hylda, twenty-seven years of age, somewhat prim and musical, had given her promise to an electrician whom the engineer believed was not fit to dust her shoes. Richter, used to breaking and thrashing coolie oilers, ordered Gathright from the house and locked up his daughter.

She cried for seven days. Gathright was seen in town. Richter's rage gave way to an engineer's calculation.

"What for I study in University and college? Why do I hold certificates? I fix Gathright!"

No oil was smoother than Richter's well-laid plan; he sent Hylda away and met Gathright.

"All right about my daughter," he told the electrician. "You go one voyage with me—we'll see Henningay—I'll fix you up so that you can draw one hundred and fifty dollars in wage, with a rating as electrician aboard the *Seriphus*."

Gathright went with Richter to San Francisco. They recrossed the Bay, without seeing Henningay, Jr., and, at dusk, climbed over the shoring timbers and went aboard the *Seriphus*. Richter's voice awoke echoes in the deserted ship and dry-dock:

"Come, I show you my dynamo and motors. We go to the boiler-room first, where the pumps are."

The boiler-room, forward the engine-room of the tanker, was a place of many snakelike pipes, valves, sea-plates and oily seepage from the feedtanks. The *Seriphus* was a converted oil-burner, having been built before crude petroleum was used for steaming purposes. Three double-end Scotch boilers made the steam that drove the tanker's triple-expansion engine.

Richter knew the way down to the boiler-room, blindfolded. He struck matches, however, to guide Gathright, and remarked that the newer ships of Henningay's fleet had a storage-battery reserve for lighting purposes when the dynamo ceased running.

Gathright, somewhat suspicious of Hylda's father, took care to keep two steps behind the chief-engineer. They reached and ducked under the bulkhead beam where the door connected the engine-room with the boiler-room. Richter found a flashlamp, snapped it on, swung its rays around and about as if showing Gathright his new duties.

"There's a motor-driven feed-pump," he said. "Something's the matter with the motor's commutator. It sparks under load—can you fix it up?"

There was a professional challenge in the chief engineer's voice; Gathright forgot caution, got down on his knees, leaned toward the motor and ran one finger over the commutator bars. They seemed polished and free from carbon.

Richter reversed his grip on the flashlamp, swung once, twice, and smashed the battery-end of the lamp down on Gathright's head, just over the top of the electrician's right ear.

Gathright fell as if pole-axed and dropped with his hands twitching on a metal plate.

Striking a match, Richter surveyed the electrical engineer.

"Good!" he grunted. "Now I put you where nobody'll ever look—unless I give the order."

A STUMP of candle, stuck by wax to a feed-pipe, allowed Richter illumination sufficient to work by. Swearing, sweating, listening once, he fitted a spanner to bolt-heads on a man-plate in the spare boiler and removed the stubborn bolts until the plate clanged at his feet.

Gathright was a slender man, easy to insert through the man-hole; Richter had no trouble at all lifting the electrician and thrusting him out of sight.

It seemed to the engineer, as he hesitated, that Hylda's lover moaned once and filled the boiler with a hollow sound.

Hesitation passed; and Richter swallowed his superstitious fears, put back the man-hole plate, bolted it tighter than it ever was before, almost stripping the threads, and stepped back, mopping his brow with the sleeve of a shore-coat.

There was nothing very unusual in Richter's further actions that evening. The ship-keeper, who came aboard at daylight, long before the dry-dock men began work, noticed a wet shore-hose, a thin plume of steam aft the tanker's squat funnel, and there was a trailing line of smoke drifting aslant the *Seriphus'* littered deck.

"Been testing that spare boiler," explained Richter, when the ship-keeper ducked through the bulkhead door. "I think it's tight an' unscaled, but th' starboard one will need new tubes and general cleaning. Get me some soap—I want to wash up."

Richter dried his hands on a towel, tossed it toward the motor-driven feed-pump, then, when he left the boiler-room, his glance ranged from the tightly-bolted man-hole cover up to a gauge on a steam-pipe. The gauge read seventy-pounds—sufficient to parboil a heavier man than Hylda's lover.

"I think that was a good job," concluded the first engineer of the *Seriphus*.

The second engineer of the tanker, a Scot with a burr on his voice like a file rasping the edge of a plate, stood watching Richter balance himself as the stout chief came along a shoring-beam.

"I mark ye ha' steam up," commented the Scotchman, when Richter climbed over the dry dock's wall.

"Yes, in the spareboiler."

Mr. S. V. Fergerson tapped a pipe on his heel.

"I made an inspection, myself, of that, not later than yesterday forenoon. She was tight as a drum an' free from scale. I left th' man-hole—"

"Damn badly gasketed!" growled Richter.

Ferguson started to explain something; but the chief was in a hurry to get away from sight of the *Seriphus*. There was a memory on the tanker that required a drink or two in order to bring forgetfulness. Richter gave the Scot an order that admitted of no answering back.

"Go aboard an' blow off steam! That boiler's all right!"

A roar, when Richter strode past the dry-dock's sheds, caused him to wheel around and listen. Ferguson, according to orders, was blowing off the steam from the spare boiler.

Something, perhaps water or waste, clogged the pipe; and the escaping vapor whistled, sputtered, and rose to a high piercing note that sounded to the chief's irritated nerves like the cry of a soul in agony. The note died, resumed its piercing screaching. Richter's arm and hand shook when he mopped his brow and drew a wet sleeve down with an angry motion.

In fancy the noise that came from the *Seriphus'* starboard side, echoed and deflated by the hollow dock, was Gathright calling for Hylda. Richter covered his ears and staggered away.

EZRA MORGAN hastened such repairs as were required for making the *Seriphus* ready for sea; the tanker left the dry-dock, steamed out the Golden Gate, and took aboard oil at a Southern California port.

All tanks, a well-lashed deck load of cased-lubricant—consigned to a railroad in Manchuri—petroleum for the furnaces, brought the *Seriphus* down to the Plimsoll Mark; she drove from shore and crossed the Pacific where, at three God-forsaken Eastern roadsteads, she unloaded and made agents for the oil-purchasers happy with shipments delivered on time.

The romance of caravan routes, and pale kerosene lamps burning in Tartar tents, escaped both Ezra Morgan and Richter; they went about their business of changing American and English minted gold for certain contrabands much wanted in the States. The chief engineer favored gum-opium as a road to riches; Ezra dealt in liquors and silks, uncut gems and rare laces.

Fortunately for the chief engineer's peace of mind, the spare, double-end Scotch boiler was not used on the Russian voyage. Gathright was forgotten and Hylda, safe in an eastern music school, was not likely to take up with another objectionable lover. Richter, relieved of a weight, went about the engine-room and boiler-room humming a score of tunes, all set to purring dynamos, clanking pumps, and musical crossheads.

At mid-Pacific, on a second voyage—this time to an oilless country, if ever there were one, Mindanao—a frightened water-tender came through the bulkhead door propelled by scalding steam, and there was much to do aboard the *Seriphus*. The port boiler had blown out a tube; the spare, midship boiler was filled with fresh water and the oil-jets started.

Richter, stripped to the waist, it being one hundred and seventeen degrees hot on deck, drove his force to superhuman effort. Ezra Morgan, seven hours after the accident, had the steam and speed he ordered, in no uncertain tones, through the bridge speaking-tube.

Fergerson, a quiet man always, had occasion, the next day, to enter the chief's cabin, where Richter sat writing a letter to Hylda, which he expected to post via a homeward bound ship. Richter glared at the second engineer.

"That spare boiler—" began Fergerson.

"What of it?"

"Well, mon, it's been foamin' an' a gauge-glass broke, an' there's something wrong wi' it."

"We can't repair th' port boiler until we reach Mindanao."

Fergerson turned to go.

"Ye have m' report," he said acidly. "That boiler's bewitched, or somethin'."

"Go aft!" snarled Richter, who resumed writing his letter.

He hesitated once, chewed on the end of the pen, tried to frame the words he wanted to say to Hylda. Then he went on:

"—expect to return to San Francisco within thirty-five days. Keep up your music—forget Gathright—I'll get you a good man, with straight shoulders and a big fortune, when I come back and have time to look around."

Richter succeeded in posting the letter, along with the Captain's mail, when the *Seriphus* spoke a Government collier that afternoon and sheered close enough to toss a package aboard. Ezra Morgan leaned over the bridge-rail and eyed the smudge of smoke and plume of steam that came from the tanker's squat funnel. He called for Richter, who climbed the bridge-ladder to the captain's side.

"We're only logging nine, point five knots," said Ezra Morgan. "Your steam it low—it's getting lower. What's th' matter? Saving oil?"

"That spare boiler is foaming," the chief explained.

"Damn you and your spare boiler! What business had you leaving San Francisco with a defective boiler? Your report to Mr. Henningay stated that everything was all right in engine-room and boiler-room."

"Foam comes from soap or—something else in the water."

"Something else—"

Richter got away from Ezra Morgan on a pretense of going below to the boiler-room. Instead of going below, however, he went aft and leaned over the taffrail. Somehow or other, he feared that spare boiler and the consequence of conscience.

Limping, with three-quarters of the necessary steam pressure, the *Seriphus* reached Mindanao and was forced to return to California without repairs to the port boiler. While repairs, new tubes and tube-sheet were put in place by boilersmiths, Richter saw his daughter, who had come west from music school.

The change in her was pronounced; she spoke not at all of Gathright, whose disappearance she could not understand; and Richter, keen where his daughter was concerned, realized that her thinness and preoccupation was on account of the missing electrician.

"I get you a fine fellow," he promised Hylda.

He brought several eligible marine engineers to the house. Hylda snubbed them and cried in secret.

An urgent telegram called Richter back to the *Seriphus*. He made two long voyages, one down Chili-way, the other half around the world, before the tanker's bow was turned toward California. Much time had elapsed from the night he had thrust Gathright into the spare boiler and turned on the oil-jets beneath its many tubes. Once, in Valparaiso, an under engineer pointed out red rust leaking from the gauge-glass of the spare boiler.

"Looks like blood," commented this engineer.

Richter scoffed, but that afternoon he drank himself stupid on kummel, obtained from an engineer's club ashore. Another time, just after the tanker left the port of Aden on her homebound passage, a stowaway crawled out from beneath the cold boiler and gave Richter the fright of his life.

"Why, mon," said Fergerson, who was present in the boiler-room, "that's only a poor wisp o' an Arab."

"I thought it was a ghost," blabbered Richter.

Barometer pressure rose when the *Seriphus* neared mid-Pacific. Ezra Morgan predicted a typhoon before the tanker was on the longitude of Guam. Long rollers came slicing across the *Seriphus'* bow, drenched the forecastle, filled the ventilators and flooded the boiler-room.

Richter went below, braced himself in the rolling engine-room, listened to his engines clanking their sturdy song, then waddled over the gratings and ducked below the beam that marked the bulkhead door. An oiler in high rubber-boots lunged toward the chief engineer.

"There's something inside th' spare boiler!" shouted the man. "Th' boiler-room crew won't work, sir."

Richter waded toward a frightened group all of whom were staring at the spare boiler. A hollow rattling sounded when the tanker heaved and pitched—as if some one were knocking bony knuckles against the stubborn iron plates.

"A loose bolt," whispered Richter. "Keep th' steam to th' mark, or I'll wipe a Stillson across th' backs of all of you," he added in a voice that they could hear and understand.

Superstition, due to the menacing storm and high barometer, the uncanny

noises in the racked boiler-room, Richter's bullying manner, put fear in the hearts of the deck crew. Oil-pipes clogged, pumps refused to work, valves stuck and could scarcely be moved.

"I've noo doot," Fergerson told his Chief, "there's a ghost taken up its abode wi' us."

Richter drank quart after quart of trade-gin.

THE BAROMETER became unsteady, the sky hazy, the air melting hot, and a low, rugged cloud bank appeared over the *Seriphus'* port bow.

Down fell the barometer, a half-inch, almost, and the avalanche of rain and wind that struck the freighter was as if Thor was hammering her iron plates.

Ezra Morgan, unable to escape from the typhoon's center, prepared to ride out the storm by bringing the *Seriphus* up until she had the sea on the bow, and he had held her there by going half speed ahead. A night of terror ruled the tanker; the decks were awash, stays snapped, spume rose and dashed over the squat funnel aft the bridge.

Morning, red-hued, with greenish patches, revealed a harrowed ocean, waves of tidal height, and astern lay a battered hulk—a freighter, dismasted, smashed, going down slowly by the bow.

"A Japanese tramp," said Ezra Morgan. "Some *Marau* or other, out of the Carolines bound for Yokohama."

Richter, stupid from trade-gin was on the bridge with the Yankee skipper.

"We can't help her," the engineer said heavily. "I think we got all we can do to save ourselves."

Ezra Morgan entertained another opinion. The storm had somewhat subsided, and the wind was lighter, but the waves were higher than ever he had known them. They broke over the doomed freighter like surf on a reef.

"Yon's a distress signal flying," said Ezra Morgan. "There's a few seamen aft that look like drowned rats. We'll go before th' sea—I'll put th' sea abart th' beam, an we'll outboard oil enough to lower a small-boat an' take those men off that freighter."

The maneuver was executed, the screw turned slowly, oil was poured through the waste-pipes and spread magically down the wind until the freighter's deck, from aft the forehouse, could be seen above the waves.

Over the patch of comparative calm oars dipped, and a mate, in charge of the small boat lowered from the *Seriphus*, succeeded in getting off the survivors who were clinging to the freighter's taffrail.

The small boat lived in a sea that had foundered big ships. It returned to the tanker's bow; and the four men, bruised, broken, all half-dead from immersion, were hoisted to the forepeak and taken aft. Two were Japanese sailors and two were Americans—a wireless operator and an engineer. The engineer had a broken leg which required setting, and the wireless operator was in a bad fix; wreckage had stove in his features, and twisted his limbs.

Ezra Morgan was a rough and ready surgeon-doctor; he turned the *Seriphus* over to the first-mate and made a sick room out of Richter's cabin. The chief protested.

"Get below to your damn steam!" roared Ezra Morgan. "You hated to see me bring aboard these poor seamen; you said I wasted fuel oil; your breath smells like a gin-mill. Below with you, sir!"

The engine-room and boiler-room of the tanker, she being in water ballast, was not unlike an inferno; the first-mate, acting on Ezra Morgan's instructions, drove the *Seriphus* at three-quarter speed into a series of head-on waves; the ship rolled and yawed, tossed, settled down astern, then her screw raced in mingled foam and brine.

Richter's stomach belched gas; he became sea-sick, climbed into a foul-smelling "ditty-box" of a cabin, aft the engine-room, and attempted to sleep off the effect of the gin. Picture-post-cards, mostly of actresses, a glaring electric over the bunk, oil and water swishing the metal deck below, and the irritating clank of irregular-running engines drove sleep away from him.

Fergerson, the silent second-engineer, came into the "ditty-box" at eight bells, or four o'clock. Fergerson's thumb jerked forward.

"I'll have t' use that spare boiler," said he.

"What's th' matter, now?"

"Feed-pipes clogged in starb'ard one, sir."

"Use it," said Richter.

Steam was gotten up on the spare, double-end Scotch boiler; the starboard boiler was allowed to cool; Fergerson, despite the tanker's rolling motion, succeeded in satisfying Ezra Morgan by keeping up the three-quarter speed set by the skipper.

Richter sobered when the last of the trade-gin was gone; the *Seriphus* was between Guam and 'Frisco; the heavy seas encountered were the afterkick of the simoon.

Rolling drunkenly, from habit, the chief went on the bridge and asked about getting back his comfortable cabin aft. Ezra Morgan gave him no satisfaction.

"Better stay near your boilers," advised the captain. "Everything's gone to hell, sir, since you changed from kummel to gin!"

"Are not th' injured seamen well yet?"

"Th' wireless chap's doing all right—but th' engineer of that Japanese freighter is hurt internally. You can't have that cabin, this side of San Francisco."

"What were two Americans doing in that cheap service?"

Ezra Morgan glanced sharply at Richter.

"Everybody isn't money mad—like you. There's many a good engineer, and mate, too, in th' Japanese Merchant Marine. Nippon can teach us a thing or two—particularly about keeping Scotch boilers up to th' steaming point."

This cut direct sent Richter off the bridge; he encountered a bandaged and goggled survivor of the freighter's wreck at the head of the engine-room ladder. The wireless operator, leaning on a crutch whittled by a bo'sain, avoided Richter, who pushed him roughly aside and descended the ladder, backward.

White steam, lurid oaths, Scotch anathema from the direction of the boiler-room, indicated more trouble. Fergerson came from forward and bumped into Richter, so thick was the escaping vapor.

"Out o' my way, mon," the second engineer started to say, then clamped his teeth on his tongue.

"What's happened, now!" queried Richter.

"It's that wicked spare boiler—she's aleak an' foamin,' an' there's water in th' fire-boxes."

Richter inclined his bullet shaped head; he heard steam hissing and oilers cursing the day they had signed on the *Seriphus*. A blast when a gasket gave way, hurtled scorched men between Richter and Fergerson; a whine sounded from the direction of the boiler-room. the whine rose to an unearthly roar: Richter saw a blanket of white vapor floating about the engine's cylinders. This vapor, to his muddled fancy, seemed to contain the figure of a man wrapped in a winding shroud.

He clapped both hands over his eyes, hearing above the noise of escaping steam a call so distinct it chilled his blood.

"Hylda!"

NOW there was that in the ghostly voice that brought Richter's gin-swollen brain to the realization of the thing he had done in disposing of Gathright by bolting him in the spare boiler.

No good luck had followed that action; Hylda was still disconsolate; trade and smuggling was at a low ebb; there was talk, aboard and ashore, of reducing engineers' and skippers' wage to the bone.

Richter had a Teutonic stubbornness; Ezra Morgan had certainly turned against his chief engineer; the thing to do was to lay the ghostly voice, make what repairs were necessary in the boiler-room, and give the tanker's engines the steam they needed in order to make a quick return passage to San Francisco and please the Henningays.

An insane rage mastered Richter—the same red-vision he had experienced when he threw Gathright out of his daughter's house. He lowered his bullet head, brushed the curling vapors from his eyes, and plunged through the bulkhead door, bringing up in scalding steam before the after end of the midship, or spare boiler.

Grotesquely loomed all three boilers. They resembled humped-camels kneeling in a narrow shed by some misty river. Steam in quantity came hissing from the central camel; out of the furnace-doors, from a feed-pipe's packing, around a flange where the gauge-glass was riveted.

The *Seriphus* climbed a long Pacific roller, steadied, then rocked in the trough between seas; iron plates, gratings, flue-cleaners, scrapers, clattered around Richter who felt the flesh on neck and wrist rising into water blisters.

No one had thought to close the globe-valve in the oil supply line, or to extinguish the fires beneath the spare and leaking boiler. Richter groped through a steam cloud, searching for the hand-wheel on the pipe line. All the metal he touched was simmering hot.

A breath of sea air came down a ventilator; Richter gulped this air and tried to locate the globe-valve with the iron wheel. Vision cleared, he saw the red and open mouth of the central camel—the flannel-like flames and he heard through toothed-bars a voice calling, "Hylda!"

Fergerson and a water tender dragged their chief from the boiler room by the heels; blistered, with the skin peeled from his features, Richter's eyes resembled hot coals in their madness. Blabbering nonsense, the engineer gave one understandable order:

"Put out th' fire, draw th' water, search inside th' spare boiler—there's something there, damit!"

Ezra Morgan came below, while the spare boiler was cooling, and entered Richter's temporary cabin—the "ditty-box" with the play actresses' pictures glued everywhere. Fergerson had applied rude doctoring—gauze bandages soaked in petroleum—on face and arms.

"What's th' matter, man?" asked Ezra Morgan. "Have you gone mad?"

"I heard some one calling my daughter, Hylda."

"Where do you keep your gin?"

"It's gone! Th' voice was there inside th' spare boiler. Did Fergerson look; did he find a skeleton, or—"

Ezra Morgan pinched Richter's left arm, jabbed home a hypodermic containing morphine, and left the chief engineer to sleep out his delusions. Fergerson came to the "ditty-box" some watches later. Richter sat up.

"What was in th' spare boiler?" asked the chief.

"Scale, soda, a soapy substance."

"Nothing else?"

"Why, mon, that's enough to make her foam."

Richter dropped back on the bunk and closed his lashless eyes.

"Suppose a man, a stowaway, had crawled through th' aft man-hole, an' died inside th' boiler? Would that make it foam—make th' soapy substance?"

"When could any stowaway do that?"

Richter framed his answer craftily: "Say it was done when th' *Seriphus* was at Oakland that time th' boilers were repaired in dry-dock."

Fergerson drew on his memory. "Th' time, mon, ye went aboard an' tested th' spare boiler? Th' occasion when ye took th' trouble to rig up a shore-hose in order to fill th' boiler wi' water?"

"Yes."

"Did ye ha' a man-hole plate off th' boiler?"

"I removed th' after-end plate, then went for th' hose. We had no steam up, you remember, and our feed-pumps are motor-driven."

"Ye think a mon might ha' crawled through to th' boiler during your absence?"

"Yes!"

"Ye may b' right—but if one did he could ha' escaped by th' fore man-hole plate. I had that off, an' wondered who put it back again so carelessly. Ye know th' boiler is a double-ender—wi' twa man-holes."

Richter was too numbed to show surprise. Fergerson left the "ditty-box" and pulled shut the door. The tanker, under reduced steam, made slow headway toward San Francisco.

One morning, a day out from soundings, the chief engineer awoke, felt around in the gloom, and attempted to switch on the electric light.

He got up and threw his legs over the edge of the bunk. A man sat leaning against the after plate. Richter blinked; the man, from the goggles on him and the crutch that lay across his knees, was the wireless operator who had been rescued from a sea grave.

"No need for light," said the visitor in a familiar voice. "You can guess who I am, Richter."

"A ghost!" said the chief. "Gathright's ghost! Come to haunt me!"

"Not exactly to haunt you. I assure you I am living flesh—somewhat twisted, but living. I got out of that midship boiler, while you were bolting me in so securely. I waited until you went on deck for a hose, and replaced the after man-hole cover. I was stunned and lay hidden aboard for two days. Then I looked for Hylda. She was gone. I shipped as electrician for a port in Japan. I knocked around a bit—at radio work for the Japanese. It was chance that the *Seriphus* should have picked me up from the *Nippon Maru*."

"That voice calling for Hylda," cried Richter.

"Was a little reminder that I sent through the boiler-room ventilator; I knew you were down there, Richter."

The marine engineer switched on the electric light.

"What do you want?" he whined to Gathright.

"Hylda—your daughter!"

Paul Richter covered his eyes.

"If she will atone for the harm I have done you, Gathright, she is yours with her father's blessing."

The Invisible Terror

An Uncanny Tale of the Jungle

By HUGH THOMASON

OLD MAN Jess Benson, cattleman and mine owner, rode across the high plateau, which divided the rich grazing lands between Rock Valley and Slater Canyon, and let his horse pick its way down the steep slope to Slater Creek. Here, as the sorrel slaked its thirst, the big man in the saddle filled and lighted his pipe, while his eyes roved slowly through the sprinkle of cottonwoods which fringed the creek.

About fifty feet upstream, close to a large bowlder and partly behind a clump of stunted plum bushes, half a dozen magpies were quarreling over something that the rider could not clearly distinguish. He could merely see a dark blotch behind the bushes—the carcass of a cow or steer probably—and he watched the beautiful black-and-white birds speculatively as they uttered their shrill, raucous cries, and fluttered about the thicket.

Since there was a possibility, however, that the dead animal might be carrying his own brand, Benson finally turned his horse in the direction of the birds. Half a minute later, having reached a spot from which he could command a clear view of the thing that lay behind the bushes, his tanned cheeks went ashen, and he swung himself to the ground with an exclamation of horrified surprise.

Close to the thicket, and five or six feet from the rock, the body of a man was huddled in the horrible posture of one who has met a violent end.

He was lying partly on his side, one leg drawn up, the other outstretched, while both arms were bent under him. His face and neck were terribly torn and mangled, and his flannel shirt had been ripped half off his body, which was bruised and covered with wounds. Several paces away was a trampled felt hat, and the muzzle of a revolver peeped from beneath the body, its butt evidently clutched in the stiffened fingers of one hand. For a dozen feet the ground was torn and trampled, as though a terrible struggle had taken place.

For several minutes Benson stood still and eyed the ghastly thing in horrified fascination. Long experience as a range rider told him that the body and the signs of conflict about it could not be more than forty-eight hours old—the thing had happened since a heavy rain of two days before—and it slowly dawned on the cattleman that the dead man was Nathan Smith, a neighbor of his, who owned a small farm some five or six miles away.

For some time he studied the body and the surrounding soil very carefully, noting especially that the soft earth was covered with large, doglike tracks; then he went to his horse and untied his slicker from the back of the saddle. With this garment he managed to cover the body so that the magpies could no longer reach it. Then he mounted his horse and rode off toward Elktooth, ten miles away.

Sheriff Parker and Doctor Morse, the coroner, happened to be together in the latter's office when Benson entered and told his story. Both men listened without any particular comment, and at the end the sheriff got to his feet.

"I'll run you out in the car, Horace," he informed the coroner. "We can reach the spot easily enough by following the old road up the creek. From what Benson says, the thing does not look like a crime exactly—it seems more like the work of wolves, though I never heard of any attacking a man in this region; but you can never tell. At any rate, we'd better look into it as soon as we can."

It was about an hour later when the three men got out of the machine and walked the few feet which separated them from the scene of the tragedy. Lifting the slicker, Doctor Morse stooped over the gruesome object beneath it, while Sheriff Parker gazed at the trodden ground with interest. While the coroner made his examination, the little officer paced around the thicket, eying the tracks thoughtfully; more than once he stooped to apply a pocket rule to some especially distinct impression, and twice he whistled softly to himself. By the time the doctor's examination had ended, he was turning a speculative eye toward a dim trail which led off at right angles through the cottonwoods.

Returning from washing his hands at the edge of the stream, Doctor Morse looked at his friend in contemplative silence, as he lighted a cigar and puffed at it nervously.

"Well?" the sheriff questioned, at length. "What was it? What killed him, Horace?"

"Bless me if I know, Bert. I never saw anything like this before in all my experience. It was an animal of some kind, I should say; a wolf, perhaps, although, as you said, the few wolves we have hereabouts have never been known to attack humans. But the man is frightfully mangled, his jugular vein is quite torn out of him. Had his gun in his hand, too. It's empty. He must have fought the thing hard, whatever it was. I wonder—could it have been the 'plague'?"

Sheriff Parker nodded in an absent way, his eyes still fixed on the faint trail through the trees and weeds.

"I think it was," he said. "This spot is only a little way removed from where the creature has been in the habit of roaming, and poor Smith, I suppose, was caught here after dark. These tracks match those we found near Moore, and they look pretty fresh. How long should you say he has been dead?"

"Killed early last night, I should judge," was the doctor's answer. "He died hard, too, poor chap. Look at that ground."

Jess Benson, with horror written all over his honest features, had been staring at the two men as they talked. Big, burly, outdoor giant that he was, he seemed to be in the grip of a kind of terror—or was it awe?—that made him incapable of speech.

"Heavens, what an end!" he burst out at length. "What are we going to do, sheriff? How'll we ever get the thing that killed him?"

Sheriff Parker made no answer. He merely continued to search the ground around the body for a few minutes longer, as though he wished to make doubly sure that his suspicions were correct; then he helped the others wrap the body in a blanket and stow it in the car. Five minutes later, save for the trampled ground and some dull-brown, ominous stains on the grass, there was no sign of the tragedy apparent.

Two hours later, seated at his own desk with a cigar between his teeth, Sheriff Parker squinted through his glasses at Doctor Morse, who sat opposite.

"I tell you, Horace," the sheriff was saying, "it is such a thing as never has been known before. If I had not been studying the results of this creature's work for the past six weeks, I could not believe that such a thing could be. Still, it *must* be so! Poor Jack Moore, he was the first victim; we were morally certain that the thing got him; then that strange waving of the alfalfa in Pollard's meadow, and now this. I tell you, it's awful, Horace!"

"It is; it's more than that, Bert; it's unnatural." Doctor Morse puffed jerkily at his cigar. "And yet, science tells us that there are sounds the ear cannot detect, why not colors the eye cannot see? Take the only time the beast, or the 'plague,' as we have begun to call it, appeared in daylight. I mean that uncanny agitation in Pollard's hayfield that afternoon, when some heavy creature thrashed about there. It could be heard, and the alfalfa moved, but the thing itself could not be *seen*, though three different people stood watching."

"You are quite right, Horace; and I have already spent a great many sleepless nights milling over that 'neutral color' theory. Recently I have read that at the end of the solar spectrum there are things known as actinic rays. They represent colors—integral colors in the composition of light—which we are unable to discern with the naked eye. The human eye is, after all, an imperfect instrument. Undoubtedly there are colors which we cannot see, and this beast, this scourge of the neighborhood, is of some such color."

"Aside from its color," the coroner mused, "the creature is tangible enough. It leaves a track in the ground larger by far than that of a full-grown timber wolf, and it certainly can fight. Benson says his hounds were soundly thrashed by it last week, you know, and there is Smith. He was a very powerful man, and armed, but, so far as we know, the thing killed him and got away unscathed. The man's body looked as if it had been struck by a train. The chest and sides might have been beaten in with a sledge, his clothes were torn to shreds, and as for his throat—well, the less said about that the better."

Sheriff Parker said nothing for several minutes. Getting to his feet, he began to pace slowly back and forth across the room, fingers interlaced behind his back and head bowed in the way he sometimes affected when in deep thought.

He was struggling with a problem the like of which he had never before tackled; and as he watched him, the coroner, in his turn, strove to devise some method of wiping out the creature which was terrorizing the entire valley.

ALMOST SIX weeks before, Jack Moore, a stock inspector, whose duties often carried him far out into the thinly settled portions of the country, had been found dead under circumstances similar in every way to those surrounding Smith's end.

At first, the authorities and general public had attributed the death to timber wolves, for the sole reason that they could attribute it to nothing else. The tracks about the body, though exceedingly large, were shaped like a wolf's, and the body itself had been torn and mangled as by some carniverous animal.

Soon after Moore's death came the killing of a dozen sheep in their pasture, and, on the heels of this, Judson Pollard, a prosperous farmer whose word was beyond dispute, with two of his hired men, had seen something rush through an alfalfa meadow—something that they could not make out, though it was broad daylight, and they could see the tall hay wave and shake, and could even hear the creature as it thrashed about there.

Then Jess Benson's hounds, a pack of fourteen, which had never met its match in numerous encounters with wolves and coyotes, had been soundly whipped, and three of its number killed outright in a fight with some animal which their owner could not see, although he had witnessed the fight from a distance.

Now, as a climax to the whole business, had come Nathan Smith's horrible death; and no man could say who or what would be the next victim. No wonder the entire county could talk of little else, and that the creature, whatever it was, had been named the "plague"!

As he thought over all these things for the hundredth time, Sheriff Parker cudgeled his brain in an effort to form some plan for trapping and killing the beast. He knew that there must be a way, somehow, to make an end of the terror, even though the most skillful trappers and hunters in the district had failed to discover it. The animal's range was known. It seemed, for the most part, to frequent the country between Slater Creek and White Horse Mountain, probably because this region contained plenty of timber and natural shelter; and it was in this region that it must be cornered. For many years the little sheriff had studied the crimes of men, and few criminals had ever had just cause to boast of outwitting him; but this was a different task.

"Horace," the sheriff burst out finally, coming to an abrupt halt in front of his friend, "this butchery has gone far enough. We must put an end to it. What do you say to trying this very night? The beast seems to roam mostly at night, and tonight will be moonlight. We'll try to trap it at the Black Pool."

Doctor Morse stared at the speaker in surprise.

"The Black Pool?" he repeated. "Are you crazy, Bert? To be sure, we have discovered, so far as possible at any rate, that the beast seems to frequent the pool more than any other one spot; but how can we trap it? That has already been tried more than once."

"True, Horace; but we shall try in a different way. This thing, whatever it is, though it can't be seen, can be felt and heard; therefore it must have a solid body, so to speak. It leaves a distinct trail, you know, and its victims are proof enough that it is a creature of flesh and blood. My scheme is to *make* it visible—then, if we are lucky, we can shoot it."

The coroner jumped to his feet in his excitement.

"I see what you mean!" he cried. "Why haven't we thought of that before? But how, Bert—how will you do it?"

"That remains to be seen." Sheriff Parker smiled oddly as he looked at his companion. "If you are willing to risk the thing with me, I think I have a plan that will work. We'll leave here in the car about four this afternoon; that will get us to the pool in plenty of time to set our trap before dark. Bring along your repeating shotgun—a heavy charge of buckshot is far more certain after dark than a rifle ball, and we can't afford to miss."

Doctor Morse nodded understandingly.

"I shall not fail you, Bert," he said.

EARLY DUSK found the two men in the sheriff's car slowly picking their way over the stony trail which led to the Black Pool. In the bottom of the tonneau was a ten-gallon keg, three or four short boards, and something wrapped in burlap, while the back seat held a pair of repeating shot guns and a box of cartridges. A hundred yards from the pool, at the foot of a little hill, Sheriff Parker killed his engine and stepped out onto the ground.

"We'd better leave the car here," he remarked. "It is best not to make any

more disturbance in the immediate vicinity of the pool than we can help, and we can easily carry what we need from here. But let's look around a bit first."

Together, carrying their loaded guns in the manner of men who wish to be prepared against any sudden emergency, they made their way through a fringe of trees to the edge of the black, still water, which gave the pool its name. Even by daylight the place was far from cheerful. The pool, about seventy feet in diameter, was entirely surrounded by trees which grew to within a few feet of its oily surface.

There was no sign of life about the place, not even a frog croaked, and the muddy banks bore mute testimony that none of the many cattle which roamed that region had been there to drink for many days. In one place only was the mud broken by fresh tracks; and when his eyes fell on this spot, the sheriff smiled grimly.

"You see them, Horace," he said, pointing. "The thing has been here recently—its trail is as plain as day; this must be its drinking place. Now for our little trap."

Returning to the car, the two men first carried the keg to the foot of a large tree which stood only a few yards from where the "plague" had approached the pool; then they got the boards and the other articles, which, on being unwrapped, proved to be a brass hand pump, with a long spray nozzle, and about a dozen feet of hose.

Doctor Morse regarded this contrivance with considerable perplexity. He could not see of what use it could be in the task that lay ahead of them; but when he expressed his puzzlement, his companion laughed softly.

"It's really very simple," he explained, "although it is merely an experiment of my own, and may not work as I hope it will. The keg is full of whitewash, and this pump will throw a steady stream for over thirty feet. If we can get the brute within range, my idea is to spray him with whitewash until we can see enough of him to shoot at. White always shows up fairly well in the dark. Catch the idea?"

Doctor Morse gazed at his friend in surprised admiration for an instant; then he impulsively caught his hand in a hard grip.

"You're a wonder, Bert!" he exclaimed. "I don't see how you ever thought of it, but the scheme looks good to me. I am honestly beginning to think we have a chance. But what are those boards for?"

"For a platform on the tree yonder," replied the sheriff, nodding toward a cotton wood. "For obvious reasons I thought it would be safer to do our watching from above ground, and with these boards we can construct a support that will enable us to stay in the tree with some degree of safety. Of course, the thing may be able to climb, for all we know, but we must chance that. The tree is within easy range of the water, and those tall ferns and weeds, if we watch them closely, should give us warning of the beast's approach. Now let's get busy, for it will be dark before we know it."

At the end of half an hour, just as it was actually growing dark within the shadows of the trees, the two men had built a substantial platform in a fork of the cottonwood, some ten feet from the ground, and established themselves upon it. Sheriff Parker's gun lay beside him, while he grasped the nozzle of the high-pressure pump in his hands; but the coroner's weapon was ready for instant use.

Swiftly the day turned into night, and for an hour it was as dark as pitch at the edge of the pool; then the moon, surrounded by myriads of stars, slowly climbed up over the hill-tops beyond the water. With eyes riveted upon the ferns, from the movements of which they expected to be warned of the beast's approach, the two men waited tensely.

For a long time nothing happened. From the blank darkness around them came merely the familiar noises of night in the wilderness—the long, wailing howl of a distant coyote; the chirping drone of the tireless insects in the trees; strange cries of night birds, so different from those of the birds of the day; the "plop" of muskrats diving in the still water, and all the mysterious chorus of small sounds that one never notices until after night has fallen.

Seated on their narrow platform, the watchers were soon very uncomfortable, for the mosquitoes were numerous and hungry, and the men dared not smoke for fear the smell of tobacco would give warning to the thing they sought. Doctor Morse, eyes fixed on the top of a ridge which could be seen through a break in the trees, and beyond which the stars and the moon seemed to be grouped, was half dozing, when suddenly he straightened up with a little start.

A curious thing had taken place! The stars, rising above the crest of the ridge, *had successively disappeared from right to left!*

Each was blotted out for but an instant, and not more than two or three at the same time, but along half the length of the ridge, all that were within a few degrees of the crest were eclipsed. Something had passed along between them and the coroner's line of vision; but he could not see it, and the stars were not close enough together to define its shape. After a second of tense watching, Doctor Morse reached out and gripped the sheriff by the arm.

"Did you see it?" he whispered. "It's coming, I think."

"Yes; but be quiet, for your life!" Sheriff Parker leaned forward and shifted his grip on the hose nozzle.

For several minutes all was silent, then came a faint patter of stealthy feet, and something like the sniffing of a hound sounded below them, while the ferns waved violently, although there was no breeze. Almost immediately came the sounds of lapping in the water—sounds exactly like those made by a thirsty dog when drinking.

Taking careful aim with the nozzle, Sheriff Parker suddenly pumped out a steady stream of whitewash which began to splash and spatter on the edge of the pool and surface of the water. And, as the milky liquid began to fall, the two watchers saw a strange and wonderful thing. In a spot, which ten seconds before had been merely opaque darkness, *an outline grew up and took shape out of the ground;* a strange, monstrous, misshapen thing, squat and hairy, not unlike a huge wolf in general appearance, but broader and more powerful than any wolf either man had ever seen.

For an instant after the whitewash began to fall upon it, the thing turned a big-jawed, hairy face in the direction of the tree; then, with a horrible snarl of fury, which both men plainly heard, it charged toward them.

"Shoot! *Shoot,* Horace!" Sheriff Parker yelled, dropping the useless nozzle and grabbing his gun.

The two heavy guns, charged with double loads of buckshot, roared out almost together. There was a coughing snarl from the thing on the ground, which save for a white patch or two, was almost invisible again, and the sound of convulsive struggling; then the sheriff fired a second time. Almost immediately there was a heavy splash in the water; then absolute silence.

Doctor Morse wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with a shaking hand.

"Did we get it?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yes, I'm almost sure of it." Sheriff Parker, though tremendously excited, began to lower himself to the ground. "No animal of the wolf type could stand up against three charges of buckshot at less than a dozen yards," he declared. "I believe it is dead, Horace."

(Continued on page 116)

HELEN ROWE HENZE Spins a Compelling Yarn

THE ESCAPE

"ARE YOU sure?"

The doctor nodded briefly. "Very sure, and the quicker the better!"

Donaldson gripped the back of the chair beside him till his knuckles showed white.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," the doctor spoke a trifle contemptuously. "Appendicitis is quite commonplace. We operate for it as many as a hundred times a year at the hospital."

Donaldson rose slowly to his feet.

"I'll let you know sometime soon," he said, staring about him vaguely.

"All right. But I'd advise you to have it done quickly."

Donaldson shuffled toward the door.

"I'll let you know," he murmured, and went out.

He descended to the street. He was a man of average height, and rather thin. He was dressed respectably in clothes of a few years back, but still good. One felt that he was careful of them, timidly careful. His blue eyes wandered in odd moments from one object to another, and his thin lips tried to maintain a firm line, but drooped weakly, if, perchance, he forgot. Then he twitched them up, reining them hard, trying to appear casual, indifferent. But his step would drop into its habitual short uncertainty, his shoulders slump down a bit, his eyes begin their covert roving, his whole figure expressing a desire to occupy as small a space as possible, as though his soul and body were squeezed in with a wish to be inconspicuous.

As he emerged from the doctor's office, his pale eyes shifted as he gazed at the moving throng on the street. Why couldn't it have been some one else? Here they were, all so gay, so unconscious of him and the shadow that hung over him. Unconscious! That was the word which had so terrified his mind for ten long years. And that was what the anesthetic meant—unconsciousness!

Donaldson threaded his way along and turned into a little side street until he came to his house. He let himself in with his key. The bare hall resounded dismally to his footsteps. The gaunt, shadowy room gave him only a chilly welcome. When Mrs. Saunders had kept house for him, it had been more cheerful. There was not that deathlike stillness when he came in. That had been several years ago, and since then his fear had increased through long keeping, like some great, lank brute, gnawing in the darkness. It was a sly, suspicious fear that shunned companionship. He had lived for ten years all alone, except for Mrs. Saunders, the housekeeper, but finally even her presence had become too much, and he had sent her away.

He began stupidly preparing dinner. There was some ham, cheese, a half loaf of bread, and a few potatoes which he peeled, standing by the sink. There was also a small pie that one of the neighbors had sent him a few days ago. Kindly people they were, unable to understand Donaldson's solitary life, and who took pity on him and occasionally sent him little bits of pastry or jelly to freshen his meal.

Once, when he was sick with a cold, the husband had brought him over half a tumbler of whisky, but Donaldson had shuddered and held up his arms as if to ward off the other, crying, "None of that! Go away! Let me alone!"

And the neighbor had withdrawn, attributing this strange behavior to the sickness. But no, Donaldson's fear of whisky was almost equal to that of the beastlike fear that dogged his footsteps or lurked in the shadows ahead of him.

Ever since that terrible, unforgettable night when he had drunk it for the first and last time, he had had a wild terror of it. Even the sight of it recalled more vividly the white, strained face of his wife as she fell to the floor, and the red mark of the fender across her temple. He remembered how he had gone away and brought Jack Dingler home with him a few hours later, and they had found her. The neighbors had been so sympathetic toward him in his calamity. Even the same neighbors that brought him the whisky and went home saying sorrowfully, "Poor Mr. Donaldson. He's never been quite himself since the missus was murdered. It seems to have turned his mind."

They were right. His mind was turned. John Donaldson knew what it was to be afraid. For ten terrible years, fear had skulked behind him. His composure and his self-reliance vanished. He had become a coward with the ever-present fear that in some way, by some word or action, he would reveal his secret. He had kept ever alert. Fear, the driving power that would not let him slumber. He always kept his door bolted at night, and the room next to his empty, for fear that he might talk in his sleep.

That was his greatest dread, that sometime, in an unconscious state, he would talk. He learned to take the greatest precautions in regard to his personal safety. He never went on long journeys, nor took an unnecessary risk. And now—appendicitis!

ONE NIGHT, a week later, Donaldson woke up with a start, his body wet with perspiration. He had been dreaming a terrible dream. It seemed as though he saw the white face of his wife with the red mark across the temple, only she was standing up and looking at him with an unfamiliar, ghastly expression in her eyes, and behind her, looking over her shoulder, was a satyr's face, long and yellow.

Then this figure stepped out and came toward him, holding chains in its hands. Chains for him, Donaldson! He had had dreams like this before, varying slightly in detail sometimes, but always with the same terrible suggestion. And always he had waked up as he did now, wet and cold, with the same monstrous fear clutching him, pricking him like a thousand needles, drawing up his flesh, paralyzing him with a queer, uncanny thrill.

He wondered if he had talked in his sleep. Of course, there was no one to hear, still he wondered. It was something he could never know, an awful, threatening uncertainty that hung over him, that would always hang over him.

And those chains! He had a mental vision of himself in the penal stone quarries, chained to an iron ball.

He looked at his watch. It was later than he had thought—six o'clock. He got out of bed and dressed quickly. He knew from experience the only way to work off the stultifying effect of his dreams. It was physical action, to walk and walk until he tired himself out. Then his mind would be loosed from this crazy, nervous terror, and he would relapse into the steady, dogged fear from which he knew no respite.

He opened the door and stepped into the street. The morning sun was beginning to lighten the grey, deserted court. Some one across the way closed a win-

dow. Donaldson straightened up, tightening his lips. Even this early they might see him. He must appear casual, like a man of leisure out for a morning stroll.

But it was an effort, for an unreasoning fear possessed him. He wanted to run. Something behind him seemed to urge his footsteps faster. It seemed to him that his feet actually were going faster than the rest of his body, as though they obeyed the will of that something behind him, while he himself was really moving only at a moderate gait.

He had a detached sense of two entities. One was John Donaldson as he appeared to the world, a slender, inconspicuous man, walking somewhat timidly along the street, and the other was the coward, the terrified being, running from the thing that followed him; alert, cunning to outwit his pursuer. Once, from an irresistible impulse, he dodged into an alley-way. Then, suddenly ashamed and realizing, he came out again, walking boldly, his eyes fixed on a passing horse, trying to appear unconcerned.

Toward noon he returned, and, remembering he had had no breakfast and that there was nothing to eat in the house, stopped at the corner grocery store. The grocer was waiting on another customer when Donaldson came in, but he looked up and nodded.

"Be with you in a minute, Mr. Donaldson." And then, "Why, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

Donaldson had sat down suddenly on a flour-barrel, clutching his side, his face gone grey with pain. The grocer ran to get a glass of water.

"Here, better drink this! What's the matter? Can I help you?"

But Donaldson only shook his head over his knees, unable to speak. They got him home a little later, when the pain had eased a little, and sent a doctor in to see him. Donaldson did not want a doctor, but the grocer was frightened by his pale face and paid no attention to his protests.

The verdict was what Donaldson had anticipated, appendicitis and the necessity of an immediate operation. He heard it, lying on the bed, from a strange doctor, with a feeling, in spite of the pain in his side, that it must be another man under sentence. He could not take that anesthetic! The pain might kill him; then let him die! It would be better than those awful chains. For he knew that once unconscious, the truth would come out, that all the poison which had been maddening him for years would flow from his lips in self-exposure, once he was placed under an anesthetic. How many times had he already related it in the stillness of the night? What of his secret could the walls of his room not tell? They must have heard it over and over.

The doctor repeated his statement and Donaldson nodded.

"Yes," he said mechanically. He must appease this man, lest a refusal make him too insistent. When the doctor was gone, he was safe again. He would get well. Everybody had these attacks; they meant nothing.

"I'll be back to see you tonight," said the doctor, as he prepared to leave.

"No," said Donaldson, "don't come. I'll be all right."

"I'll be here," answered the doctor, and went out.

Suddenly a great fatigue came over the sick man, an overwhelming drowsiness, a desire for sleep, one of the primal, insistent, compelling things that would not be denied.

When he awoke it was quite dark. He did not know the time. Lights shown in the houses across the street. The ticking of the clock was the only noise to be heard. The darkness of the room seemed palpable, as though it floated over and around him, breathing. Then the clock struck eight. Donaldson remembered. The doctor was coming back. He might return any minute. Only he must not! There were footsteps on the walk. It was he, and the door was unlocked! Donaldson rose and started toward it. He had forgotten his side. He was only conscious of a difficulty in moving, like in a nightmare, as though weights were dragging on his feet. The doctor was on the porch. Donaldson struggled. What was holding his feet?

"Don't come in," he gasped. "I'm all right!"

Then came the pain, like a sudden knife-blade, piercing him. He screamed, one awful, uncontrollable yell, and pitched forward.

THERE WAS A queer, unfamiliar smell, and stillness. Not the empty stillness of his own house, but the stillness of human beings and hushed movements.

Nausea possessed him. He opened his eyes for a moment and then closed them. He was in a white-walled room, darkened. Against the drawn blind he could feel the sunlight beating. A ray of it came in between the shade and the window-jamb and struck the opposite wall. It was broad day. Suddenly, quick and clear as an arrow released from a taut bow-string, Donaldson's mind leaped up into consciousness.

He was in a hospital, and it was over—the operation. It was the anesthetic which had nauseated him. What had he said? Had he betrayed himself? Yet here he was, lying quietly in this room. However, they couldn't take him away while he was sick.

They were waiting—waiting till he got well to put the chains on him! He knew it. That was why they were so quiet, not to make him suspicious. He would ask the nurse. She could tell him whether he had talked.

But the nurse was not there. She did not know he was awake. Well, he would wait and ask her. Maybe he hadn't talked. People didn't always. The sun streamed against the blind. Light, hope! It might be that he would see it again, free! That he would walk along the streets in the open day.

The door opened and the nurse entered. She came to his bedside. He would smile at her easily, indifferently. She would think his question a casual one.

"Nurse," he began. His voice sounded far away, weaker than it should have.

The nurse smiled. "How is my patient? Feeling better?"

"Nurse," he strove valiantly to make his voice strong, casual. He even smiled weakly. "Did I—er—talk under the ether?"

"No, not a word. Now rest quietly and I'll come back after a while." And she went out.

Donaldson sighed. He was still safe. She had told him so. She would not deceive a sick man. And yet—wouldn't she? He remembered reading somewhere that patients were always told they had not talked, lest the knowledge excite them and hinder their recovery.

That was why she had said it. They wanted him to get well, so they could put the chains on him. Hadn't she hesitated a bit before she answered? He had thought she looked at him a bit suspiciously. Now he was sure of it. And that was why. They didn't want him to know they knew. They wanted to be sure they'd get him.

Just then Donaldson's thoughts were interrupted by a noise on the street. Some vehicle clattering over the pavement and the sound of a bell. The door was standing slightly ajar. Two nurses were passing in the hall, and Donaldson's straining ear caught their voices:

"What is all the noise about?" asked one.

"I don't know," replied the other. "It sounds like a police patrol."

(Continued on page 114)

THE SIREN

A Storiette That Is "Different"

By TARLETON COLLIER

WITH AN ABRUPT jerk, Joe Wilson, from lying on a cot in the little tent, lifted himself on his elbow in an attitude of intent listening. There was no sound except the hum of a sleepy breeze through the pines, the sleepier contralto of a mocking bird, and the purring undertone of rippling water.

"That's her!" he whispered. With an effort he sat erect, and again told himself: "That's her!"

All at once there came the crackle of voices without, the sound of thudding footsteps. Joe flung himself back on the cot and closed his eyes with furious energy as the flap of the tent was lifted and the engineer and the doctor peered within.

"He's asleep," said the engineer in a low voice.

"*Hm!*" said the doctor. He was a wizened little man with spectacles. Then he let the flap drop, and his voice came to Joe brusquely through the canvas. "Well, we'll come back. I want to talk to him. He's probably not very sick, but—by God, man, you've got to keep your men from the water around here, or you'll never finish your railroad!"

They were walking away as he spoke, and to Joe the voice seemed to fade.

"I tell you . . . . polluted . . . . fever . . . ."

Then they were gone, the sound of them swallowed up in the ripple of the little creek over the rocks. With a start, Joe again was erect, his eyes furtive, glancing about the little canvas chamber. He tiptoed to the flap, and lifted it a bare inch, peering out upon the receding figures of the two men as they passed beneath a water-oak.

With no less caution he crept to the other end of the tent, and stepped through the flap into the open. For a moment he stood irresolute, his eyes closed, as if he were dizzy.

"Keep away from the water, you fool!" he whispered.

There was no other sound of life in the woods now; the breeze had died and the mocking bird was silent. Only the prattle of a nearby stream over its rocky bed . . . .

With a stumbling, nervous stride that was almost a run, Joe Wilson went toward the sound of the water, and at last he plunged through a thick clump of willows and stood stiff, half-crouching, at the top of a bank of damp green moss that sloped steeply to a little stream with pools like black wells, still and silent. Only the silver shallows between pools rippled with life.

At the foot of the bank was a shelf of rock, splotched green with moss, reaching into the stream barely an inch above the water. Upon it Joe's glance rested, as if held by a power outside himself. He drew back into the willows, his sunken eyes closed in his pale face; then, with a sudden spring, he was over the bank and perched upon the rock.

Something like a smile lighted his face, as if with the leap he had settled a troublesome matter. He sat down as easily and comfortably as he might, his legs doubled, his hands clasped about his knees; and stared intently into the black pool at his feet.

And then, between a closing and an opening of his eyes, a woman was there where he had looked for her.

There was no sense of suddenness about the apparition; only, when he closed his eyes against a dizziness, there was the water and nothing else; when he opened them, an instant later, she was standing in the midst of the pool, almost where he could touch her. And it was as if she had been there all the while.

The water reached a little above her ankles. Her legs were bare to the knees, clothed above that, and her body as well, in a soft clinging garment of white that seemed a part of her; white throat and arms were bare. Her face was alive with a pleasant smile; her eyes, of green and gray together, were alive and pleasant, too.

"You are late," she said. There was something of the stream's bright ripple in her voice.

Joe Wilson could only smile in answer; then his smile faded and his face was scornful and somewhat stubborn.

"Yes," he said, "and I came near not coming at all. I swore I wouldn't."

"But you came," she said, still smiling.

"Only to tell you that this is the last time."

Her smile, merrier now, was accompanied by a sound that might have been the gurgle of a little whirlpool in the rapids, or it might have been a low note of laughter.

"You didn't mean it, then, that you love me," she chided, coming nearer. It was not by a step that she moved, or by any perceptible effort. The space between them all at once was lessened, nothing else.

Joe had lost his careless air and posture. He was on his knees, a fury in his words.

"I didn't mean it? You can't say that. I have become less than a man, I love you so. You bring me here every day to do as you will, and I would die if I didn't come, I love you so. For you I have broken my word to my friends back there in camp. And I don't know who you are or *what* you are."

Again that gentle sound that might have been a sudden swirl of the water, or her laughter. Then she was nearer, and her pleasant eyes looked into his, mockery in them.

"You don't know who I am?" she asked softly. "And yet I am yours."

The stubborn lines in Joe's face vanished. A quick throb of blood choked into a gulp the word he would have spoken, and he stretched out his arms. She was suddenly beyond his reach.

"Yours," she said again, and that she laughed there was no doubt this time.

Joe's eyes were hungry. Joe leaned forward upon his stiffened arms, and stared at her like a wistful dog.

"I don't know who you are," he whispered. "I don't know who you are."

"I am whoever you want me to be," she said.

"I'll call you Sadie," he said.

"Sadie?" Her lids drooped, veiling her eyes, but their narrow glimmer was keenly alive.

"Yes, there is a girl—"

Between two words she was close before him at the edge of the rock.

"I am yours," she said in a fierce, low voice. "What do you care for any girl? I am all woman, and you have me. What do you care for the world? You have me."

He felt her breath on his face. There was warmth and fragrance in it. Her

white beauty was greater than that of the dogwood blossoms showering there through the gloom under a sudden breeze; and a dizziness struck him, so that the trees swam before his eyes.

"I have you," he repeated thickly, rising to his feet.

"And the girl. . . . Sadie?" she asked.

"You are Sadie. Only you. I have forgotten. . . ." He put out his arms, but she was beyond his reach again, her eyes mysterious.

With outstretched arms, he begged her to return.

"I love you," he said.

For a full breath she looked at him gravely. Then, "We shall see," she said, plunging her hands into the stream. As she arose, her hands were cupped and brimming with water. She moved toward him, smiling.

Terror gathered in Joe's white face.

"Drink," she tempted him.

He whispered "No," and the refusal seemed to strengthen him, for when she said again, "Drink," he shouted it: *"No!"*

She dropped her hands, and the water went splashing back into the stream; and, smiling still, she came nearer until she was beside him upon the rock, her wet feet glistening silver upon its greenish-brown surface. Her eyes held fast his wide, frightened stare.

"Why?" she asked him, when she was so close that he was aware of the warmth and fragrance of her person.

He answered her steadily:

"I will not, that's why. I must not. I have told you I must not, every day that I have come here, and yet I have always drunk this water. It has made me less than a man. It has made me break my word and my own rules."

Once more her eyes were grave. "You must not?" she asked. Her voice might have been that of the purring shallows. There was no escaping her gaze, and before it his eyes wavered and shifted. His shoulders drooped.

"You will not?" the purring voice went on. "Not for me, and you say you love me? It is so little that I ask."

There was pain in his voice as he cried, "Don't. . . . Sadie! I have promised. . . . the rule. . . ."

It was she whose figure drooped now, and her face that was mournful. "But you have broken the rules before this for me," she murmured.

"I came today to say that I would no more."

"But it is so little I ask. And I—am —yours."

He pleaded: *"Don't!"*

With sudden abandon, she flung herself against him, and for the first time his arms closed about her. She yielded to his fierce embrace, her head against his breast.

"You do not love me," she whispered.

"Sadie. . . !" His arms tightened with his cry, and a red mist blinded him as he felt her warm, vital body closer against him.

She lifted her face and looked at him.

"You will?" she asked, smiling.

"No," he said, almost with a moan.

She kissed him. "To drink, only to drink," she said softly. "It is so little. I have given you myself. . . . isn't that something?"

With one arm she clung to him as tightly as he held her; the other arm was free, and with her hand she stroked his face. Her kisses were hot upon his lips. His eyes were closed, and he swayed with a dizziness that was mightier than any other he had known.

"Only to drink," she said. "Do you not care for me, and I have given you myself? What are those men in the camp to you, they and their rules? You will not drink. . . . yet I give you. . . . this. . . ."

Her lips met his in an eternity of giving and taking.

"No!" he said again, but his voice quivered and broke, with the plain message of surrender.

With a little cry, she knelt at the edge of the pool, her arms still about him so that he was forced to kneel with her. She plunged her hands into the water, and lifted them to him with their silver freight.

With an eager, moaning sound, he drank the cool water; and as he did so the red mist before his eyes thickened, and his ears roared with the thunder of blood within. To drink became then his passion, and he cupped his own hands, filled them with water, and drank.

For a moment the mist cleared and the roaring ceased, and he saw that he was alone on the rock.

"Sadie!" he called.

The answering sound might have been only the prattle of the stream, or it might have been low laughter.

The thought came to him that perhaps she had fled to the bank, and with prodigious labor he clambered up the tiny slope. She was not there. He parted the soft-flowing curtain of the willows, and though the fronds were so light a bird might have flown through them, he gasped with the effort it cost him.

Staggering into the sunlight beyond the fringe of trees, he found that she was not there, either. He tried to run, but only stumbled, lifting himself painfully to stagger onward. Then the mist of his delirium closed upon him, and the blood at his ear drums pounded and a tumult came out of earth and sky to overwhelm him.

THE DOCTOR and engineer, going fishing, stumbled upon his crumpled form an hour later. The former, a wizened, spectacled little man, bent over him and studied him with eyes that seemed to see everything. He studied the young fellow's pulse, loosened his shirt, stared into the pupils of his eyes. At last he turned to the other, frowning, and said:

"Fever, and maybe that damn' typhoid. He's the sickest man I ever saw."

Then his voice rose with a flare of anger.

"Say, can't you keep these fools away from this water?" he asked. "There's death in it."

Men, Lost at Sea, Live Through Week of Horror

A HARROWING adventure that probably will never leave their minds befell two fishermen of Freeport, L. I., who passed a week in the open sea in a small motor boat, without water or provisions. Caught in a blizzard off the Long Island coast, something went wrong with their compass and they headed out to sea, where they drifted for nearly a week before the schooner, Catherine M., saw their signals of distress and picked them up. The two men—Capt. Bergen Smith and Harry Matthews—had only a small supply of water and a few raw potatoes. On this they lived for the first two days. Then Matthews lost control of himself, drank sea water and became delirious. Raving in delirium, he urged Smith to split a bottle of iodine in a suicide pact. Their boat began to leak, and they ripped the lining from their overcoats to calk the seams. Finally, after a number of ships had passed without seeing them, they were rescued, more dead than alive, by the schooner.

A Night of Horror in the Mortuary

THE MADMAN

By HERBERT HIPWELL

PETER STUBBS has snow-white hair, and he is only twenty-eight. He mutters to himself as he pursues his lowly task of sweeping the streets in our little university town. Children gibe at him and goad him to rage and tears.

Peter once had raven black hair and was as fine and strong a young fellow as ever led the town forces in their frequent battles with our students. That was before the one night he spent as caretaker of our medical school. Only two of us know the real story of that night and why Peter was taken from the building next morning, a gibbering and white-haired idiot.

We have remained silent for various and selfish reasons, but I can no longer keep to myself the story of that awful night.

Our medical college is a lonely, ramshackle old building. The town has grown away from it. It is surrounded by musty old junk yards and infrequently used railway sidings, and it is miles from the fine old group of buildings which form the rest of the university.

There has always been difficulty in getting a suitable caretaker for it. None of the many engaged could be relied on to come early enough to get the fires going properly and to keep the walks clear of snow. Our new dean, Dr. Towney, thought he had solved the problem by deciding to have a caretaker live permanently on the premises.

Peter Stubbs, on learning of this, applied for the post and had no difficulty in obtaining it. The dean showed him around the building and explained the duties required of him. A more imaginative man might have been a little chilled by the gaunt skeletons arranged in the cases of some of our classrooms. Certainly he would not have been pleased with the sleeping quarters picked out for him. The only room available was a closetlike place directly connected with our mortuary.

Frequently, bodies would be there overnight, awaiting the purposes of the college. Most persons would not welcome these as night-time neighbors, but Peter scoffed and said he would as soon sleep there as in a brightly lighted hotel.

Chic Channing and I heard his foolish boast, and Chic and I had old scores to pay with Peter.

His sturdy fist had left a blue circle around my eye for a week, and Chic was minus a tooth as a result of a hot encounter between Peter's followers and us freshmen.

Chic jumped at this brilliant opening for reprisal.

"Are you game for a little ghost-walking?" he whispered to me, as Peter and the Dean passed to another part of the building.

I asked for details.

"It's the chance of a lifetime if we have the nerve," he declared. "Let's sneak back into the building tonight, crawl on to a couple of slabs in the mortuary and cover ourselves with sheets. We'll look enough like corpses to fool Peter if he looks in. Then, when Peter goes to bed and it gets good and lonely, we can come to life with a few gentle moans, get Peter aroused, and then do a little ghost dance for his benefit. After we have him frightened stiff we can take off the sheets and give him the laugh. The story will get around quick enough, and poor old Peter won't be troubling us freshies any more."

I could scent trouble in the wild scheme, and I hastily began to offer objections.

"Peter knows there aren't any bodies in there now," I said.

"That's all right," Chic replied. "I heard the dean tell him that a couple might arrive late today. In fact, I know there will be one there for certain. One of the inmates at the government hospital for the insane died today, a poor beggar who was so wild they had to keep him locked up tight all the time. He had no friends, so the body is to come here and the undertaker has already gone for it."

I was still unconvinced, but I had no plausible excuses. I felt my eye, which was still sore from Peter's bruising, and I assented to the crazy plan.

CHIC was right about the body. The undertaker's car drew up to the college just as we were leaving. We were the last students to go, and the dean was the only other person there.

He asked our aid in bringing the body to the mortuary, and we laid it on a cold marble slab. Peter arrived from supper, to begin his first night's stay, just as the dean and we were leaving.

True to my promise, I met Chic near the college about ten o'clock and we prepared to carry out our plan. My courage was oozing already. One of those wan yellow moons was the only light around the dreary building, and every rustle of a leaf or a disturbed pebble began to send shivers up my spine. But I couldn't turn back.

Silently, we pried open one of the loosely locked basement windows. Then we crept up dark stairs and through the classrooms, where I imagined I could see the skeletons standing out like white patches in the murky darkness.

We reached the mortuary room and groped our way in. I almost cried out as my hand suddenly came in contact with the dead maniac, but I recovered myself. Chic groped in the corners until he found two immense white sheets.

We climbed upon adjacent slabs, and stretched out on our backs and pulled the coverings over us. I managed to keep a small corner raised so that I had a partial view of the room as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness.

The stillness grew intense. We heard the long, dreary hoot of a freight engine. I shivered involuntarily and thought of the real corpse a few feet away.

Footsteps echoed in the building. Peter was making a round of inspection before retiring. He switched on the lights in the mortuary and gave a little whistle of surprise at the three still, white figures lying there.

Then he began to whistle again, a little tremulously. Evidently he was not feeling as bold as when he accepted his post. He went to his little room, but was soon back again.

In his hand he held a small coil of rope, apparently a clothesline. He un-

wound it, and then, very gingerly, he approached the slab on which I lay.

I felt a light blow as one end of the rope fell across me. Peter was going to take no chances on midnight ghosts. *He was going to tie us all firmly to the slabs!*

Whistling to keep up his courage, he proceeded with his task. In a few minutes I was firmly bound. I could not have moved if I dared.

Then he cut away the remaining piece of rope and proceeded to truss up Chic in the same way. He had to struggle to make the two ends of the cord meet.

There was none left for the real corpse, and, though he hunted diligently in all parts of the room, he could find no more.

He surveyed the two of us, bound firmly to the slabs, and evidently felt reassured. He decided to take a chance on the third body remaining still and retired to his room, closing the door and leaving us alone in the creepy, moonlit mortuary.

How I cursed Chic as I lay there unable to move, listening to the gradually deepening breathing of Peter as he dropped into a sound sleep. What if he should leave us bound until the professors arrived in the morning? What a fine row there would be!

These, and other unpleasant thoughts running through my mind, were suddenly checked by a slight sound which turned me cold from head to foot. Horrified, I gazed through the small chink in my covering. I could not believe my eyes.

The corpse of the maniac had moved!

THERE came a faint rustle of his covering shroud, and the body moved again ever so slightly. I wanted to shriek in terror, but I was paralyzed.

The shroud moved again, this time more noticeably. My scalp tightened, and I could feel the gooseflesh rising all over my body.

Then, with one sudden motion, the maniac sat bolt upright and threw the shroud from him.

He was clothed only in a long, hospital nightgown. His thin hair stood up in tangled wisps, and his eyes blazed like those of a cat in a dark room.

Slowly he surveyed his surroundings, and then burst into the most hideous laughter I have ever heard. His big, yellow teeth seemed like the fangs of a wild animal. I could imagine them rending my flesh.

The echo of his hideous mirth had hardly died away when Peter burst from his room, clad in his night clothes. His knees almost gave way as he took in the dreadful scene. Horror was apparent in every line of his body, and I had an inexplicable desire to laugh. But by a supreme effort I fought off this hysteria.

Quite calmly the madman swung his legs down from the slab and sat there on its edge, transfixing poor Peter with his terrible gaze. He chuckled.

Peter commenced to back toward his room. In an instant the madman was at him.

Then commenced a wild chase around the room, of which I could only catch fleeting glimpses as they passed on one side of my slab. Once the maniac rested bony hands on my body as he prepared for a new rush at Peter, whom I could hear breathing near by.

Bound hand and foot, Chic and I were unable to make a move, even if terror had not prevented us.

Untiringly, cunningly, the madman pursued his prey. Peter dodged and squirmed in terror. Perspiration poured from his face. But his efforts were futile. He was penned in a corner, at last, where a door led directly to a stairway in the corridor.

Step by step, the madman approached him, his long fingers outstretched like talons, and a low, gleeful laugh came from his lips. Peter backed desperately away from him, as though he hoped to press through the great oaken door. The maniac's fingers were almost at his throat, when the door swung back suddenly and Peter tumbled from the room, his body bumping and thudding on the stairs outside.

Startled by the sudden disappearance of his victim, the madman halted a moment. The door automatically swung shut again, firmly this time. Apparently, it had not been tightly closed before.

The insane creature flung himself at it. It repelled him. He shrieked and tore at it, but to no avail, and he finally turned away.

His eyes, now wilder than ever, swept the room. They rested on our bound figures. Swiftly, he passed over to where I lay. The rope puzzled him, and he was still for a moment.

Suddenly he grasped it and snapped it as though it had been thread. I was free, but I did not move. I waited for him to seize me, but his footsteps shuffled away. He was beside Chic now. I heard the rope which bound him snap.

In desperation, I rolled from the slab and rose trembling to my feet. The noise attracted the crazed being. He turned and faced me.

His features were distorted into a horrible grin. His sharp, cruel teeth gnashed as if in expectation of a bloody feast. He leaped at me, clearing the slab, on which I had lain, at one bound.

I was too weak to dodge, but I tried grimly to clinch with him, as I had seen groggy boxers do when they were sparring for time. I was in his arms. His eyes blazed not a foot from mine. Foam flecked his mouth. His weight pressed against me. It grew heavier and heavier.

Then my overwrought nerves gave way, and I became unconscious.

WHEN I awoke I was outside in the cool night air. Chic was bathing my brow with muddy water from a roadside pool. The madman had collapsed at the same moment as I had. In a daze, Chic had laid him again on the slab and had dragged me from the building.

Poor Peter we forgot, until he was found the next morning, haggard, white-haired and unable to utter an intelligible word.

Too vivid an imagination, wrought into a frenzy by the uncanny surroundings, was the way the doctors diagnosed his strange case. Chic and I were too dazed to shatter the theory.

As for the madman, he had really died, after the short spell of suspended animation and temporary revival. I know this because his gaunt skeleton was one of the principal decorations at our graduation dance.

But, even with this assurance, I sometimes wake at night in a cold sweat, and feel for the butt of the revolver under my pillow.

Arrest Woman Accused of Witchcraft

POPULAR rumors of a sorceress in the Logan Square district of Chicago led to the arrest of Mrs. Emily Elbert for practising medicine without a license. The woman styled herself a spiritualist and claimed the ability to heal any disease. She would make mysterious passes over her patients, and applied an evil-smelling salve, the composition of which is not known. Each visit cost the patient two dollars, and Mrs. Elbert is said to have made very good money until the police interfered with her career.

An Electrocution, Vividly Described By An Eye Witness

THE CHAIR

By DR. HARRY E. MERENESS

Former Physician at Sing Sing Prison

DR. HARRY E. MERENESS, who wrote this realistic description of an electrocution, was attending physician at Sing Sing Prison for six years, and during that period he attended, in his official capacity, sixty-seven executions in the Electric Chair—a record that has never been equaled. Among the many noted executions he witnessed were those of Lieut. Becker of the New York Police Department and the four gunmen in the Rosenthal case. Prior to their death, he attended the prisoners in the condemned cells.

"The average prisoner, approaching the moment of execution," says Dr. Mereness, "is in a mental haze or wild delirium produced by the fear of death. In two instances, however, this was lacking. Both men, after being strapped in the chair, said: 'Good-by, Doc!' "

THE MINUTE HAND on my watch indicates 5:44 a. m. I am standing in a direct line with the chair.

My gaze is directed to the left side of the room and down a short, narrow, heavily-walled corridor that forms the communication between the condemned cells and the execution chamber. There are a number of guards standing quietly about, and on my right, back of a rope stretched across the room, sit the witnesses.

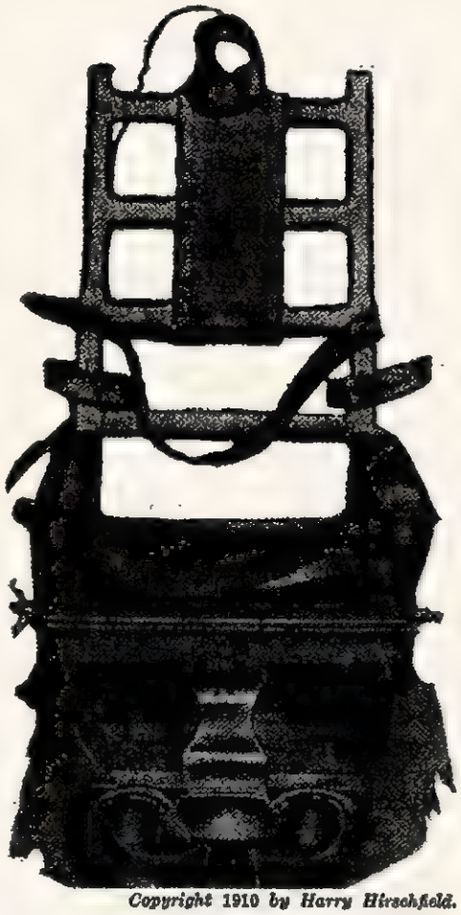
There is a tension in the very air of the chamber. Absolute quiet prevails. A few seconds pass, eternally long they are.

Then comes a sound—a muffled "Good-by, all." The sound reaches the ears of the witnesses, and involuntarily they straighten up on their stools; there is some scuffling of feet, and one witness, possibly a trifle more nervous than the rest, clears his throat. Everyone is now keenly alert.

I hear the chant of the priest—the response of the condemned man—the low, quavering and broken response, "Have mercy on me."

The little procession now enters the corridor. I see the condemned man—stocking-footed, and with his right trouser leg flapping, grimly ludicrous, for it has been slit up to the knee in order to facilitate the application of the leg electrode. He is between the deputy warden and his assistant, each supporting an arm as they slowly enter the death chamber.

At the sight of the fateful and fatal chair, the condemned man involuntarily



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shrinks back, but the guards are prepared for this, and their hold becomes a little firmer. There is no halt in their step, and but five paces away, inanimate, portentous and ominous—the chair!

After the first sight—after that sharp, quivering intake of breath—the gaze of the condemned man shifts about the room. His expression haunts one. You feel that it is both all-seeing and unseeing. The fear of death—a definite emotion—is here portrayed in a fashion that but few have beheld. There is utter finality in that look.

His eyes rest upon you. You feel that he sees you, but that you are simply one of the images in the general make-up of the last picture that is conveyed to his brain. There is no recognition in the glance—just a vague, hopeless and apparently vacant stare, but one which you feel discerns the sharp outlines of the persons and objects in the room, without recognizing features or details.

To me, that quick survey of his surroundings, that final glance of the unfortunate being on the very threshold of his meeting with his God, is the most harrowing of all the grewsome details connected with the administration of man-made Law's decree.

My watch indicates 5:45 a. m. The condemned man is seated in the Chair. The guards work quickly, two at either side and one at the head of the Chair. The arm straps are buckled fast, the leg straps next, then the face strap, which has an opening for the chin, and the upper part of which mercifully blindfolds the eyes.

The cap, a soft, pliable thing made of a fine copper mesh and lined with sponge, which has been moistened in salt water, is placed upon the head and moulded to fit its contour. To a binding-post on the cap is adjusted the heavy wire that conveys the terrific current from the dynamo in a distant part

of the prison. To the bare right leg, another electrode is applied and connected up.

A full minute has elapsed since I heard the "Good-by, all." The guards have completed their task. My notes now read: "Entered 5:44:10. Chair and strapped 5:45:00."

"Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world have mercy on me," chants the priest. And: "Have mercy on me," comes the broken, almost inaudible and inarticulate response.

I retain my position, note-book and watch in my left hand. I am standing on the right side of, and in the same direct line with, the Chair. The Chair and its occupant, the electrician and myself, form a right angle. I occupy the angle, for at the ends of the lines, which make up that angle, are the two things that demand my undivided attention—the electrician and the condemned. From my point of vantage I can see them both. My eyes are on the condemned man.

I feel the eyes of the electrician upon me. I have a new, bright yellow pencil—freshly sharpened. It is quite necessary for my notes. I hold it vertically on my note-book, and watch the occupant of the Chair. The overwhelming mental tension, coupled with the knowledge of the proximity of death, has a fearsome reaction upon the Chair's victim. With each rapid inspiration, there is a slight elevation of the shoulders, and as expiration takes place the shoulders sag. This is the very instant I have awaited—the lungs are practically free from air. I dip my pencil quickly from the vertical toward the horizontal.

There is a sudden *click*, the body in the Chair straightens, and from the mouth comes a low, sibilant *hiss;* the straps creak, and you feel that if the straps should break the body would be catapulted over the rope and amidst the witnesses.

For ten seconds the high current of eighteen hundred and fifty volts and eight to nine amperes is on; then, for forty seconds, the voltage is dropped to two hundred.

During this period the body sags perceptibly; at the end of forty seconds the current is again increased, and the body again straightens and strains against the straps. After the final ten seconds of the fatal minute, the current is switched off.

The body in the Chair actually shrinks before your very eyes! I step up to the Chair; a guard tears open the shirt and bares the chest. As I place my stethoscope over the heart I am conscious that the body is intensely hot. I know from experience that the heat generated by the rapidity of the passage of the current has raised the temperature from sub-normal to between 120 and 130 degrees.

I hear a racing, tumultuous *rat-a-tat-tat*—possibly I can count the heart beats. I lift the face strap, and with thumb and forefinger separate the lids. The eyes are glazed, but the pupils are small. I feel the great arteries in the neck. I continue to get a pulsation that tells me that the vital forces have not yet ceased.

My notes now read: "First contact—one minute—5:45:10—5:46:10."

I step off the rubber mat and nod to the electrician; the current is again thrown on, this time for five seconds. When I now listen over the heart, I am reminded of a clock that is running down; the heart beats are fainter—they become slower—they commence to skip—I fail to feel the pulsation in the neck—there is a heavier glaze over the eyes—the pupils, small and contracted a moment before, are now widely dilated. The head rests on the shoulders, and the face is directed toward the chandelier with its many lights, but there is no reaction of the pupil as the bright light strikes the eye—it remains wide and big. The muscles of the face are set, and saliva drools from the angles of the mouth.

I again place my stethoscope upon the chest, but no sound reaches my ear. I listen for five—for ten—for twenty seconds. There is nothing; all the vital reactions have disappeared.

Physicians among the witnesses are invited to listen; they take their time, for there is no reason for hurry now. After the last one finishes I make a final examination. It is as before—nothing.

My notes now state: "Second contact—5 seconds—5:47:00. Pronounced dead at 5:52:00."

I turn toward the Warden and say, "I pronounce this man dead."

The law has been obeyed.

The general attitude of tenseness is relieved. The guards quickly unbuckle the straps and carry the body to the autopsy room, and after placing it upon the stone-topped table begin to remove the clothes. The hum of conversation becomes general. The witnesses are departing.

I commence the autopsy, feeling that my report will be, "Autopsy upon the body of———No.———, convicted of murder, first degree and today executed at this prison, showed all organs and tissues to be normal."

As I begin my long sweeping incision, the thought always strikes me: "This must also be done because it is the Law," and the invariable question comes, "Is it really the Law, or is it to insure the carrying out of the Law?"

In other words, if the Chair fails, the post mortem succeeds.

THERE is little left to tell. The evening papers will state that "So-and-so, convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to death, was electrocuted at Sing Sing Prison early this morning." They will rehearse the grewsome history of the crime and will tell how the murderer, with firm step, entered the execution chamber at 5:44:10 a. m., and was strapped in the chair at 5:45:00 a. m.

These details are quite correct. I can vouch for them, for I let the reporters take my notes, which are official, and they copy the data and embody it in their stories.

They invariably dress up the "first contact," however, so their stories read about like this, "At 5:45:10 Warden Blank threw the switch, pressed the button, or dropped his handkerchief, as a signal" (it is always one of these three).

Well, I'm rather glad that they credit it to the Warden, and I really feel better that I and my new, bright yellow pencil, freshly sharpened, have been overlooked.

Rare Music Disappears Mysteriously

CASLAV ALBRECHT, a Chicago violinist, recently made a trip to Europe and brought back about thirty-five rare pieces of violin manuscript, which cannot be duplicated. Many of the compositions were original copies and the whole is valued at $5,000. The music disappeared at a party given by Frank Steiner, another musician, which Albrecht attended. He says he had the music with him when he came, and left it in the cloak-room during the festivities, and that it was gone when he was ready to leave for home. Although Albrecht was sure the manuscripts were merely mislaid, no trace of them could be found.

The Cauldron

True Adventures of Terror

CONDUCTED BY
PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY

WHILE most of the material in WEIRD TALES is, of course, fiction, we are of the belief that there are innumerable persons who have lived through experiences as weird, terrible and horrifying as anything ever chronicled by a fictionist. This belief, and the fact that WEIRD TALES deals exclusively with the bizarre and unusual, has resulted in the establishment of THE CAULDRON.

Readers who have had a hand in strange adventures, or who have been victims of experiences of a startling and terrifying nature, are cordially invited to send accounts of them to THE CAULDRON. A concrete idea of what is desired may be ascertained by reading this month's contributions. Manuscripts may be as horrible and hair-raising as it is in the power of the author to make them, but they must be clean from a moral standpoint. Those accepted will be paid for at our usual rate. Tell your story clearly and briefly. Double-spaced, typewritten manuscripts are preferred, but those in long hand will be considered if legibly written. No manuscript will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped and self addressed envelope.

THE GHOST OF DEATH

Editor of The Cauldron: There are those who are as firmly convinced in the existence of ghosts as they are that day follows night. I have heard intelligent men and women discuss ghosts seriously and tell of this and that spiritualistic seance that they attended where, before their very eyes, misty forms of long departed dead have been materialized before their very eyes. To me all this appears more or less ridiculous. During the past fifteen years I have made a very thorough study of the "phenomena" of spiritualism, and my findings have resulted in my becoming skeptical on this subject. It is because of my emphatic disbelief in the supernatural, as far as its direct relation to human man is concerned, that I submit the following as one of the most inexplicable and terrifying things that has ever occurred to me:

During the summer of 1906, my wife and I were residing in the township of North Lamoine, Maine, a fishing village situated on Frenchman's Bay, an arm of the Atlantic which extends some miles inland. Our first born, then twenty months old, had not been well for some time, and we thought perhaps a summer in the open country close to the sea would be beneficial.

For a time the little one appeared to rally, but failed to put on the weight or to assume the healthy look that a normal baby of her age should. Then came a day when my wife struck terror to my heart by telling me that she had a premonition that something would happen—that the child would not live.

I scoffed at the notion and cheered her as best I could, but there was a great weight on my heart. I had begun to feel the same way, and the fact that my wife mentioned it only intensified my grief.

Just two days after this conversation there occurred the manifestation of which I write. My work kept me up later than usual, and it was not until after midnight that I finally retired. Worn out as I was from the activities of the day, and though late the hour, it was some time before I could compose myself to sleep.

The baby, who slept with my wife at the other end of the room, moaned. A heavy electrical storm raged outside—the wind lashing the rain against the window panes in unabating fury—and my thoughts were in a turmoil.

Finally I began to doze and, I believe, was about to fall asleep when, with a start, I found myself staring wide eyed at the ceiling. No one had spoken, and, save for the baby's moans and the storm, there had been no sound, but something had impelled me to open my eyes. A moment later a cold perspiration broke out over my body.

At first, nothing was visible and then, even in the almost pitch darkness of the room, a filmy though strangely luminous grayish white object began to take form close to the ceiling just above my wife's bed. It became clearer and clearer until finally it moved.

As rigid as a marble statue I lay. Though not exactly afraid, to have saved my life I don't believe I could have moved at that moment. Gradually this indescribable object began to settle over the other bed. Just as it seemed to merge itself with the faint whiteness of the covers, the baby cried out, to be followed an instant later by a piercing scream from my wife.

"Back! back!" she gasped. "No! no! you shall not! For God's sake *back!*"

I remained motionless but an instant, long enough, however, to see the specter gather itself into a compact form, flash upward and disappear. Then, with a mighty effort, I pulled myself together and bounded out of bed.

"Oh," my wife cried, sitting up, "did you see it?"

"See what, dear?" I asked.

"Just now something white seemed to come down, with arms outstretched, as if to take little Helen away. I am sure I was not asleep."

"You must have been," I answered. "I was wide awake all along and did not see anything. The room is quite empty."

"Ugh," she shuddered, "what a terrible dream!"

There was no sleep for me the rest of that night. For hours I sat in the living-room, trying to fathom the mystery that I had beheld. I knew it could not have been imagination, for my wife had seen it also. There was no accounting for it.

And I am just as much in the dark now as I was then. God only knows what it was that my wife and I saw that night! Perhaps it was a matriculated spirit from the Valley of Death, after all.

In any event, Baby Helen died the next day.

OWEN KING.

Editor of The Cauldron: During the street car strike in Denver in 1919, I was a reporter on the *Times*. On the night when the strikers and "Black Jack" Jerome's "breakers" met in deadly conflict, I was assigned to the East Denver barns, in which Jerome's men were fortified.

Toward midnight, the strikers stormed en *masse* and, during the melée, I dropped with a bullet in my chest. Regaining consciousness, I found myself in the City Hospital. Kneeling beside my bed was my wife—Estelle. I tried to move.

"Lie still, dear," she said, rising. "You must keep very quiet. They are going to probe for the bullet."

Upon reaching the operating room, the ether instantly choked me into unconsciousness. Then occurred the strangest thing I have ever experienced. I seemed suddenly transported into a great hall, with tall, shining pillars. All around me were people clothed in white. From afar came the sound of soft music.

But what attracted me was a raised section at one end on which sat a benevolent-looking old gentleman. In his eyes there seemed to be all the sorrow and suffering of a wicked world's countless centuries. He beckoned to me. When I had come before him he spoke, and in his voice there was the golden ring of perfectly tuned chimes.

"My son," he said, "you have been brought to judgment. At present you are no longer a part of the earth's sphere. Back there science is fighting for your life. Whether science succeeds is determined by this court of justice. What have you to say for yourself?"

I trembled and became afraid. Where was I? Was I dead and in some spiritual sphere far removed from the earth?

Then I spoke. I recall, distinctly, that I rambled on at great length, attempting to make a good impression. As I spoke he listened intently, occasionally nodding his head slowly and sadly.

When I finished, he resumed:

(*Continued on page* 115)

THE EYRIE

THE TIME has come to talk of cats and Chinamen, and rattlesnakes and skulls—and why it is these things abound in yarns for WEIRD TALES. Particularly cats and Chinamen. Believe it or not, every second manuscript we open (and that's placing the average rather low) is concerned with one or the other, or both, of these.

Why is this? Is it because a cat and a Chinaman suggest the mysticism of the Orient, and thus seem excellent "props" for weird fiction? Or is it merely because both mind their own business, imperturbably pursue their destinies, and thereby create the impression that there's some deep-laid mystery here? We ask you that.

Whatever the reason, it's an odd and curious fact that when an author sets out to tell a weird tale his mind turns, as if instinctively, to cats and Chinamen. And then, for good measure, he not infrequently throws in a few rattlesnakes and a skull or two.

Sometimes the result is interesting. And sometimes it is awful! And again, sometimes, it is a ludicrous thing, unconsciously funny.

We have no prejudices against Chinese characters in fiction, and we have none whatever against cats. For that matter, we haven't any prejudices of any sort. We've published a good many stories about Chinese, and quite a large number about cats, and not a few that featured skulls and rattlesnakes. You'll find some in this June issue.

But we didn't accept those stories because of the aforementioned features, nor yet in spite of them. We accepted them solely because they were GOOD stories. We observe one rule, and one rule only, in selecting stories for your entertainment. We think we've mentioned this before, but we'll say again that our only requirement is: The thing MUST be interesting!

If a story interests us it will likewise interest others, or so we believe. And if it doesn't—Thumbs Down! And it doesn't matter a good gosh darn whether the hero, or villain, has yellow skin and oblique eyelids, or flaxen hair and sky-blue eyes, or whether or not a green-eyed cat howls atop a grinning skull. The story's the thing!

All the same, though, we would like to know why all these cats and Chinamen are slinking mysteriously through our manuscripts. We read eight before breakfast this morning (chosen quite at random), and we hope to die if there wasn't a Chinaman in every last one of them!

AND still the letters pour in from delighted readers—plenty of them! Manifestly, it is quite impossible to print more than a fractional part of them here, but we can't refrain from quoting at least three that concern Paul Suter's story, "Beyond the Door," which appeared in the April WEIRD TALES.

We take it you remember this story and will therefore be interested in these comments. The first letter comes from R. E. Lambert, secretary of the Washington Square College of New York University, New York, and reads as follows:

"Dear sir: Just as Woodrow Wilson used to say during his most trying days in the presidency that when he wanted to get his mind completely off his work he would turn to a detective story, so I turn for my own relaxation to the horror story.

"I suppose it would take exhaustive questioning by a psychoanalyst to discover why this sort of literature appeals to me, but the fact is it does so appeal. While there are hundreds of others like me in this respect, I doubt whether the number is great enough to make such a venture as yours a considerable financial success—therefore, the more praise to you for your courage in launching WEIRD TALES.

"What particularly impelled me to write this letter is the story in the current issue, entitled 'Beyond the Door.' One reason why I single this one from such a congeries of thrilling, weird tales is that, with all its mystery and suggestion of the supernatural, the dénouement and everything that leads up to it are discovered at the end to be logically and physically 'possible.' So often, in mystery stories, we are called upon to accept much that simply is not naturally possible, and we turn from them, duly horrified, but unpersuaded that the tale is more than a figment of a morbid imagination.

"From the standpoint of construction, I have read few stories that so faithfully adhere to the trinity of short story tradition—unity, coherence and mass. Especially on the score of unity, the most important of the trinity, do I find this tale worthy of much praise. Not a situation, not a paragraph, nor a sentence, but which has a direct bearing on the unfoldment of the plot. And I find no single instance where the choice of words seems to have resulted from a straining for effect. Of how many stories, whether horrific or any other kind, can this truly be said?

"Then, too, very few tales are really brought home to the reader's own intimate experience of life. Yet here we shudder at the terrors created by a guilty conscience, and approve, while we shudder, of the terrible punishment that is meted out for the wrong-doing. How very real it thus becomes to all of us!

"Finally, the author dares to do, and admirably succeeds in doing, what so few writers of fiction attempt—and mostly bungle when they do attempt. I refer to the linking of his story in the closing paragraphs to man's inevitable, age-old uncertainty as to what is to come in the hereafter. This alone elevates 'Beyond the Door' out of the ordinary run of fiction.

"Here's wishing you a well-merited success!"

The next one was written by Rev. Andrew Wallace MacNeill, minister of the Bethlehem Congregational Church, International Falls, Minnesota:

"Gentlemen: I have read with much interest and pleasure the April number of your new magazine, which I believe will make a distinctive and acceptable place for itself in magazine literature.

"I am particularly interested in the story by a new writer, Paul Suter, 'Beyond the Door' proving exceptionally appealing and gripping. I hope you will publish more work by this writer, as I believe if he maintains the standard of this story your readers will make quite a popular response."

And the third letter, which arrived in the same mail that brought the first two, came from the author himself:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I take it that even editors enjoy an occasional pat on the back, in the midst of the many black looks they receive, so I am presuming to express my appreciation of the way in which you printed my story, 'Beyond the Door,' in your April issue.

"There is a story which might easily have been rendered monotonous by unintelligent press work—because the effect of slowly undermining horror, which I had to attain, is akin to monotony. You avoided that pitfall by change of type—and (this to me is the remarkable thing) I can tell by the way in which you ran in those changes that you got absolutely every subtle suggestion which I concealed in that story—and I buried quite a lot of them there. You must have read my manuscript with a microscope. May I take the liberty of expressing my opinion that as an editor you are emphatically THERE?

"Cordially yours,
"J. Paul Suter."

We almost dislike to print this last one—it's too much like pinning a medal on our coat—but we can plead, in extenuation, that the excellence of Mr. Suter's story was not due to our editing, or printer's directions, or anything of the sort, but solely to his splendid craftsmanship. He wrote a good story and we published it, and no amount of editing could have made it any better.

If you failed to read "Beyond the Door" we earnestly recommend that you do so now. In either case, don't miss his next story. It is called "The Guard of Honor," and is fully as "creepy" as the first—and you will find it in the next issue of WEIRD TALES.

Suter is a coming writer. No doubt of that. And since he tells us, "I would rather write horror stories than anything else," we hope to publish the best of his work.

WE'VE ransacked a bale of Letters to the Editor in an effort to find some not sweet with praise! and we've found only two, and here they are:

"Dear sir: I have purchased two copies of your new magazine, have read the stories, and also the praise liberally supplied by friends and readers. I think it is time to offer a few words of criticism, since applause and praise of this kind does not mean much. The public lauds any new effort; it applauds anything, even moving pictures.

"The stories you have printed so far can be grouped under three general headings: Ghost Stories, Snake Stories, Insanity Stories. In your first issue you printed a story called 'Ooze' which approached the type of semi-scientific stories that are liked intensely by all those who are fond of the unusual, and if you would publish at least one story of this type in each issue of your magazine I am sure that your efforts would register larger sales."—Conrad A. Brandt, 563 West 150th Street New York City.

"My dear Mr. Baird: At last it arrived—that second volume. If you play that slow trick again on us we shall send one of our aviators to Chicago to get the so strenuously desired copy.

"Allow me to tell you which story in the April number I liked best and which I hate best. 'The Scar' by Dr. Carl Ramus was a gem. Plausible, scientifically correct, well told, no words wasted. 'The Whispering Thing' is the acme of foolish, silly, nonsensical, high-school girl, bucket-of-blood story. If you waste more paper on such rotten stuff I predict failure in caps."—Adeline Jugol, Covina Apartments, Los Angeles.

Ouch!

Luckily, though, not all our readers disrelished "The Whispering Thing." For instance:

"Dear sir: Having recently read the second issue of WEIRD TALES, I cannot refrain from expressing my congratulations on your rare fiction taste as an editor. I enjoyed reading the novelette by Harold Ward, but the authors who wrote 'The Whispering Thing' have an imagination which is extraordinary. I happened to read this story late at night, and I began to look for 'spooks.' Talk about horror and terror combined! This story is nothing short of a marvel.

"I sincerely believe that you have an innate tendency for selecting stories of this type, and if you keep this class of stories running you will, without the least doubt, be a success."—O. R. Hamilton, 4002 Avenue F, Austin, Texas.

With regard to the poetic effusion that follows, we're not sure whether "Witch Hazel" is spoofing us or having a spasm of ecstasy. At any rate, we'll take a chance and print the thing just as she wrote it:

"Dear Editor: No words can express how much I enjoy your magazine. Here is what I think of it:

"Oh, what is more pleasure than a show,
A party, bon bons, or even a beau?
Well, here's the answer (all readers take heed);
WEIRD TALES and a nice quiet place to read!

"It's my favorite magazine, and I can hardly wait for each number to come out. I think it is the most wonderful magazine in the world, as it is so different, so extremely interesting—but there! I can never say enough in its praise. As my little verse says, 'I like it better than anything,' and I've often said I wished some editor would publish just such a magazine, and thank you, Mr. Baird (you Good Fairy) for doing so. I can hardly wait for the next issue. Thank you for filling a long felt need, and good luck!"—Witch Hazel of St. Louis.

WE'VE scores of flattering letters here, but we're not going to print them all [prolonged and loud applause], because, for one thing, we haven't space, and, for another, we have a sneaking suspicion that our delight in reading them is not always shared by others. So we'll run only five or six more, and call it a day.

"My dear Mr. Baird: I don't mind admitting that I was a little leary about WEIRD TALES when I first heard of it. The fact of the matter is, I picked up the first copy with a good deal of prejudice against it. The reason for this prejudice is clear enough. I have always had a healthy respect for mystery stories and believe they are the hardest kind to write—and to judge.

"For this reason I am moved to write you and tell you how very much my view point has changed. You have not only sold me, you have enthused me. There is no question about your future. I've talked to many friends who have read the March issue, and I know."—A. M. Oliver, 148 North Portage Path, Akron, Ohio.

"Dear sir: I asked my newsdealer for something different in the magazine line today, and he handed me a copy of the April WEIRD TALES. I've read many so-called mystery stories, but none can compare with those I found in your magazine. It is something altogether new and most fascinating. I especially enjoyed 'The Snake Fiend' and 'The

Conquering Will.' Those sort of stories appeal to me. For anybody that is looking for something different I heartily advise your magazine. May you prosper!"—P. W. Burrows, Kearney, Nebraska.

"Dear sirs: . . . I was in the business section of Des Moines one evening recently when my eye fell upon a copy of WEIRD TALES. Struck by its unusual appearance, I bought one. When I arrived home it was rather early, and I sat down to read. Well, I had not finished a half dozen pages before I knew I had found a marvelous book—in fact, my ideal magazine. Before I had finished the second story I was as much in its power as our detective friend seems to be in the power of 'The Whispering Thing.' . . .

"But here I have been taking up your time with praise of the Wonder Magazine and haven't spoken of the most vital thing—the thing which makes such mighty entertainment possible. Please find enclosed three dollars for which please enter me for a year's subscription to WEIRD TALES, beginning with your third issue."—J. C. Wolquist, 1544 Walker Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

"Dear Mr. Baird: Three weeks ago I bought a copy of WEIRD TALES, and I am shaking yet, as you probably can tell by my scribbling! . . . The first story I read was 'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes.' It happened to be eleven-thirty when I finished the first installment, and I went to bed quaking in every limb, firmly resolved never to lay eyes on another copy of WEIRD TALES.

"A few days later I passed a news stand. There, glaring into my eyes, was the interesting cover of WEIRD TALES. I was about to turn away when curiosity whispered in my ear, 'What happened to Billy?'

"Being a woman, curiosity, of course, won, and home I went, with the copy tucked snugly under my arm . . . And now I look on WEIRD TALES as a friend indeed. I daren't let my little brother get the magazine before he does his lessons, or they would never get done, while such an absorbing magazine is around."—Miss Marguerite Nicholson, 635 North Frazier Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"Dear Mr. Baird: Congratulations! Your new magazine is simply splendid. I have often wondered just when I would be able to go to a news stand and buy a real magazine. Now all my worry has ceased . . . There is one trouble with it, and that is that it doesn't come weekly or semi-monthly."—M. Nawrocki, 854 Robinson Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

"Dear Mr. Baird: . . . I have thoroughly enjoyed DETECTIVE TALES, every issue of it, and believe that there is more good reading matter in it than in any other magazine published, and when I saw a copy of WEIRD TALES at the news stand, with your name on it, I could not resist getting it. And it has lived up to my expectations. I could not put the magazine down until I had finished every story, and that was about three o'clock the next morning." . . . —Mary Sharon, 1912 Main Street, Galena, Kansas.

And it's now three o'clock in the afternoon, and the printer is calling for copy, and—

That'll be all. THE EDITOR.

THE ESCAPE

(Continued from page 104)

They were after him! What should he do? He threw back the bedclothes. His mind was working like lightning. They would never get him. He slipped to the floor. How he got to the door he never knew. Fear lends strength. He closed it and stumbled back across the floor, half-falling against the bed.

He knew what he was going to do. He pulled up the bed-clothes from the foot of the bed with feverish haste. The sheet—that was what he wanted! He ripped open the hem a few inches, turning it back so that he could get the raw edge of the material. Then he tore off a strip the whole length of the sheet. He laughed excitedly. They'd never get him!

By this time, the cut in his side had re-opened, but he did not notice it. He knew nothing but his one mad purpose. His senses seemed to have deserted him. It was as though he were in a dream. He felt as though his mind were standing off, directing his body to do these things, and as though he were putting a senseless and inanimate other half of him through certain prescribed motions.

He tied one end of the strip to one of the iron bed-posts, then he climbed into bed and lay down. He circled the other end of the strip around his neck. The head of the bed was looped between the posts with scrolls of white iron-work. He lifted his knees and pushed with his feet till his head was through one of these openings, hanging down in the space between the bed and the corner of the room. His neck was now in a straight line between the bed-posts, bent backward, and as he breathed, he emitted from his lips little hoarse noises that seemed to struggle out protestingly from his strained throat. He knew that he could not strangle himself to death, for as soon as unconsciousness came, he would relax his hold. If he could tie the other end! That was sure and safe.

The blood rushed to his head. He pulled the knot tight, very tight, and gasped. He felt as though he were drowning. His temples throbbed, and his ears beat as though the waves were knocking against the inside of his head, now roaring, now singing with queer, unearthly hum. He relaxed his hand, and the noose slackened.

There! That was not so bad, but the blood rushed back from his brain, and the waves swirled around him now and made him fearfully dizzy. He felt like a little brig, tossed in the valley of a tempestuous sea, beaten, dazed, apathetic.

He recovered somewhat. The police! They must be on their way up! The waves were calling. Their restless surging hammered upon his brain, dulling its sensibility. There was peace beneath those waves. Unchanging peace!

But he must hurry. A cloud rose before his eyes, grey and inviting. He seemed to forget. What was he going to do? Where was that peace? Peace, something he had not known for aeons, aching, endless aeons of time. Where was it? Ah, yes! Beneath the waves, those heaving, restless, insistent waves.

"I'm coming," he murmured thickly. His tongue seemed swollen. There was need of haste. He shook himself to clear his mind for the final effort. Then he pulled the noose tight with all his strength, and tied it quickly to the right-hand bedpost.

The waves seemed to open and he was going down. He saw a faint, opalescent light beneath him. There was something precious down there. It was peace.

"I'm coming," he muttered, struggling, his arms stretched out toward it. "I'm coming!"

THE CAULDRON

(*Continued from page* 111)

"Words and actions mean nothing here," he said. "In passing judgment we consider only motives. They are everything. Remember that. It is the motives behind all actions that are important."

So saying, he turned to an aged man, who was writing in a book, and asked: "Any prayers?"

"Yes, a young woman kneels at his bed."

"You shall return to earthly existence for a time then," the judge said, raising his hands. "Heed well my words."

Then I saw a great light swell from some invisible source, and, as I looked, there seemed to be ragged scars in his palms that ran red.

When finally I opened my eyes I was again in my little bed, with Estelle and the doctor standing by. Eventually I recovered from my serious wound.

The weird vision that I had while on the operating table, though, has always been a great mystery to me. Dreams are nothing unusual for me, but this was so entirely different from anything that I have ever experienced before! I have spoken of it many times and to many people. They have not laughed, but have listened in astonishment.

What was it, I wonder? Was it the effect of the anesthetic upon my weakened system? Was it the wild distortion of my brain or, when life is flickering on the brink of eternity, are we actually brought face to face with our Creator? Will this question ever be answered in life? I wonder!

OTIS TREVOR.

THE DEATH PLUNGE

Editor of The Cauldron: I am an expert riveter. When beams are hoisted into place on buildings I hang suspended in space on a swinglike seat and rivet the sections together. Had I followed any other pursuit I probably would never have had the distinction of being the only man to fall twelve stories and live. It was during the construction of an eighteen story bank building that I experienced this extraordinary adventure.

I was working in front on the twelfth story. At this particular time I was directly under the crane which hoisted the great girders. Happening to glance down, I saw an exceptionally large load coming up. There were five. It is seldom that more than three are hoisted at once. I watched them ascend, interested in the process of landing so many. When they had almost reached the level of the fifteenth story, the roof-man gave the signal to slow down. Mistaking his motions, the crane operator pulled his reverse and the great beams swung inward.

Seeing that a collision between the front of the structure and the beams was unavoidable, I attempted to get out of the way in the event anything happened. I was not quick enough. With a crash, the girders smashed into the building right over the heavy rope from which I hung, cutting it as though it were string.

Things happened so fast then that my memory of them is confused. Instantly I was precipitated downward. I do not know what sensations a drowning man experiences, but have heard that a whole life time is flashed across the victim's mind. That is just what happened in my case. Everything I ever did came before me in those terrifying moments.

Margaret Sanger dares to tell the truth about Birth Control

FOR centuries the world has played a game of "hush" about the one most important fact of marriage. Even today tens of thousands of women are doomed to a life of hopeless, helpless drudgery—and their children are doomed to privation and neglect because the mother simply can not give so many of them the proper care or support.

Words alone can not tell the terrible sacrifice in wasted bodies and blasted lives that has been exacted from women every year. Words alone can not express the untold suffering tens of thousands of women—and children—must endure every year. That is why Margaret Sanger, herself a mother, and President of the American Birth Control League, dares to tell the truth about this important subject.

Margaret Sanger

Will you ever write a letter like this?

Only these agony-laden letters can tell the story of woman's sacrifice in all its anguish. These are but a few of thousands sent every day to Margaret Sanger by unhappy mothers who have turned to her for help in their greatest need, revealing to her the nameless fears and terrors that clutch at their hearts. Read these letters, and know for yourself what women still suffer:

"It is terrible to think of bringing these little bodies and souls into the world without means or strength to care for them. I know that this must be the last one, for it would be better for me to go than to bring more neglected babies into the world."

"My baby is only 10 months old, and the oldest of my four children is 7. I am so discouraged I want to die. Ignorance on this all-important subject has put me where I am."

"Why is it," Mrs. Sanger asks, "that the women of Australia, New Zealand, Holland, France, and many other nations are permitted to know the truths that can save them from this terrible suffering, while the women of America must still endure the agonies to which they are needlessly condemned?" Margaret Sanger considers it a slur upon the intelligence of American womankind to deny to them the knowledge which has brought freedom, health, happiness, and life itself, to the women of other nations. That is why she has braved the storms of denunciation, why she has fought through every court in the land for her right to arouse woman-kind.

In her revolutionary book, Margaret Sanger, internationally famous for her ceaseless activities in behalf of women and hailed as the liberator of her sex, shows the way out for tired, struggling womankind. With utter frankness she tears down the veil of silence that has always surrounded the subject of birth control. It is a startling revelation of a new truth that will open the eyes of women everywhere.

In her wonderful book Mrs. Sanger shows how women can and will rise above the forces that have ruined their beauty — that drag them down — that wreck their mental and physical strength—that make them an easy prey for death — that disqualify them for society, for self-improvement — and finally shut them out from the thing they cherish most, their husband's love.

In blazing this revolutionary trail to the new freedom of women, this daring and heroic author points out that women who can not afford to have more than one or two children, should not do so. It is a crime to herself, a crime to her children, a crime to society.

A Priceless Possession

Now Margaret Sanger's message to all women, contained in "Woman and the New Race," is made available to the public. A special edition of this vital book has been published in response to the overwhelming demand. Order your copy of this wonderful book at once, at the special edition price of only $2. Then, if after reading it you do not treasure it as a priceless possession, return it to us and your money will be refunded.

It is not even necessary to send a penny now. Just the coupon will bring your copy of "Woman and the New Race." It is bound in handsome, durable gray cloth, printed in clear readable type, on good quality book paper and contains 234 pages, sent to you in a plain wrapper. When the book is delivered at your home, pay the postman the special low price of $2 plus the few cents postage. But mail the coupon at once. Tear it off before you turn this page.

PARTIAL LIST OF CONTENTS

*Woman's Error and Her Debt.
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*When Should a Woman Avoid Having Children?
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*Continence—Is it Practicable or Desirable?
Woman and the New Morality.
*Are Preventive Means Certain?
Legislating Women's Morals.
*Contraceptives or Abortion.
Progress We Have Made.
*Any one of these chapters is alone worth many times the price of the book.

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Whose is the blame for the tragedy of too many children — husband or wife?

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Please send me in plain wrapper, Margaret Sanger's new book, "Woman and the New Race." I am enclosing no money, but will give the postman who delivers the book to me $2 plus postage.

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These Are Facts

Does that sound too good to be true? If it does, then let me tell you what J. R. Head did in a small town in Kansas. Head lives in a town of 631 people. He was sick, broke, out of a job. He accepted my offer. I gave him the same chance I am now offering you. At this new work he has made as high as $69.50 for one day's work.

J. R. HEAD

You can do every bit as well as he did. If that isn't enough, then let me tell you about E. A. Sweet of Michigan. He was an electrical engineer and didn't know anything about selling. In his first month's spare time he earned $243. Inside of six months he was making between $600 and $1,200 a month.

W. J. McCrary is another man I want to tell you about. His regular job paid him $2.00 a day, but this wonderful new work has enabled him to make $9,000 a year.

Yes, and right this very minute you are being offered the same proposition that has made these men so successful. Do you want it? Do you want to earn $40.00 a day?

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Have you ever heard of Comer All-Weather Coats? They are advertised in all the leading magazines. A good-looking, stylish coat that's good for summer or winter—that keeps out wind, rain or snow, a coat that everybody should have, made of fine materials for men, women and children, and sells for less than the price of an ordinary coat.

Now, Comer Coats are not sold in stores. All our orders come through our own representatives. Within the next few months we will pay representatives more than three hundred thousand dollars for sending us orders.

And now I am offering you the chance to become our representative in your territory and get *your* share of that three hundred thousand dollars. All you do is to take orders. We do the rest. We deliver. We collect and you get your money the same day you take the order.

You can see how simple it is. We furnish you with a complete outfit and tell you how to get the business in your territory. We help you to get started. If you send us only six average orders a day, which you can easily get, you will make $100 a week.

Maybe You Are Worth $1,000 a Month

Well, here is your chance to find out, for this is the same proposition that enabled George Garon to make a clear profit of $40.00 in his first day's work—the same proposition that gave R. W. Krieger $20.00 net profit in a half hour. It is the same opportunity that gave A. B. Spencer $625 cash for one month's spare time.

If you mail the coupon at the bottom of this ad I will show you the easiest, quickest, simplest plan for making money that you ever heard of. If you are interested in a chance to earn $200 a week and can devote all your time or only an hour or so a day to my proposition, write your name down below, cut out the coupon and mail it to me at once. You take no risk, and this may be the one outstanding opportunity of your life to earn more money than you ever thought possible.

Find Out Now!

Remember, it doesn't cost you a penny. You don't agree to anything and you will have a chance to go right out and make big money. Do it. Don't wait. Get full details. Mail the coupon now.

C. E. COMER, THE COMER MFG. CO.
Dept. 11-C, Dayton, Ohio

JUST MAIL THIS NOW!

THE COMER MFG. CO., Dept. 11-C, Dayton, Ohio

Please tell me how I can make $200 a week as your representative. Send me complete details of your offer without any obligation to me whatsoever.

Name _____

Address _____

Though stricken with horror, I tried to keep my mind clear. Far below me I could see clusters of people gazing at me, horror stricken, as I fell, turning over and over.

In a moment's time I was within four stories of the pavement. My breath was almost gone. Insane with the thought of the terrible fate that awaited me, I shut my eyes. Then, with a great roaring in my ears, I struck, and, though almost dead, knew that it wasn't the street. For an instant I was aware of great pain and then . . . nothingness.

Within an hour I had regained consciousness. Fate was with me that day. Just as I fell a big open truck, piled high with cardboard boxes, had stopped beneath me. In this I landed; my fall was broken by these boxes, and I escaped a most horrible death.

Upon examination, it was found that I suffered four fractured ribs, a compound fracture of the left leg, two breaks in my right arm and a break in my left wrist in addition to severe cuts about the body and head. That is my story. I call it a narrow escape.

JOHN BURKHOLZ.

THE INVISIBLE TERROR

(Continued from page 102)

When they warily approached the edge of the pool, however, the two men could find no sign of the thing they had shot at, beyond a number of footprints in the soft ground, and, in one spot, very close to the water, a large splotch of crimson, which made the little sheriff chuckle exultantly.

"He was hard hit, and he's sunk in the pool," he declared positively, "sunk in water that no man has ever yet found the bottom of—a fitting end for such a beast, although I won't deny that I should have enjoyed a close look at the body. But it's too late now, and, at any rate, the brute is dead. Let's be getting home, Horace."

Seek Solution To Sahara Desert Mystery

AN attempt is being made this Spring to penetrate the heart of the great Sahara Desert and solve the mystery that envelops the savage Tribe of Tauregx, a band of wild Arabs who have never recognized any civilized authority. Both men and women members of the tribe always keep their faces veiled in black. The region where they dwell is known as the Land of Terror. The Chicago Tribune organized the expedition, which is making the 2,000-mile journey across the hot sands on camels.

Light is the fastest-moving thing in the universe. It travels at the speed of 186,326 miles a second. This tremendous speed would carry a person around the earth seven times in one second!

For Boys and Girls Also

Do You Need This Help?

Check off at the right the one that most interests you and I will send you my booklet and personal advice.

The Natural Body Brace

overcomes WEAKNESS and ORGANIC ailments of men and women. Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, health, strength and ability to do things. IT HAS HELPED NEARLY 200,000.

Read what users say: "Helped relieve strenuous pains and overcame permanently a spinal curvature." "Lifted me physically out of darkest depths of suffering after everything else had failed." Gives one an upright, perfect form." "I wore it for strength; using a week back—it certainly accomplished its purpose." "Comfortable as a dream." "Worth all the money in the world."

Wear It 30 Days Free at my expense. Write me in confidence for my booklet. Check chart at right. I will at once write you my personal advice and give you our liberal proposition.

HOWARD C. RASH, President, Natural Body Brace Co.
400 Rash Building, Salina, Kansas

- ☐ Weak back
- ☐ Better figure
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Round shoulders
- ☐ Rupture
- ☐ Constipation
- ☐ Nervousness
- ☐ Enlarged abdomen
- ☐ Weak lungs
- ☐ Stomach trouble
- ☐ Misplaced organs

Agents

YE GODS! Some Summer Seller! Made $215 today

—Writes Dooley

The big opportunity of a generation—the one big chance for quick big profits to agents. Wonderful OLIVER Oil-Gas Burner turns any range into a Real Gas Stove—does away with dirty coal and wood. Burns 95% air, 5% oil. No odd off at turn of valve. Every woman wants the Oliver for freedom from drudgery of roasting Summer Kitchens. Sensesstarting.

FREE FORDS J. Cornegay is making $1,200 profit a month. M. Russell, $600 a month. Skinner, $250 a week! During the last two months we paid out over $150,000 in salesmen's commissions! Oliver Burners sell themselves. Every demonstration a sale. Get your Free Territory and Free Sample Offer quick. Clean up big this Summer. Drive a Ford. Free Fords to producers. Write or telegraph for full details. Address me personally. C. M. Oliver, President

OLIVER OIL-GAS BURNER & MACHINE CO.
2416-R Oliver Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

LEARN RADIO

Here's your opportunity. Radio needs you. Win success in this fascinating field. Trained men in demand at highest salaries. Learn at home, in your spare time.

Be a Radio Expert

I will train you, quickly and easily, to design, construct, install, operate, repair, maintain, and sell all forms of Radio apparatus. My new methods are the most successful in existence. Learn to earn

$1,800 to $10,000 a Year

FREE Wonderful, home-construction, tube receiving set, of latest design. Write for "Radio Facts" free. Engineer Mahoney.

American Electrical Association
Dept. 176 4513 Ravenswood Ave., Chicago

How You Can Make Money In Your Spare Time

By Learning to Play Your Favorite Musical Instrument this New Easy Way

"I BOUGHT a house and a lot, and paid $1,100 toward it; all earned through teaching piano," writes Mrs. Mary A. Olsen, 3715 Wadsworth St., Los Angeles, Cal. "I would not take $1,000 for my financial and social gain through your lessons. I don't know how you can give so much for so little. I think your method is just wonderful."

Mrs. Olsen is only one of more than three hundred thousand men, women and young people who have become accomplished musicians through this wonderful new method. All the intricate "mysteries" of music have been reduced to a system of amazing simplicity. Every step is made as clear as A. B. C. You don't have to know anything whatever about music. You learn to play your favorite instrument right in your own home, quickly, easily and without endless study and practice. Long before you now think it could ever be possible, you will actually play well enough to be in demand as a well-paid entertainer, teacher or musician.

A delighted 17-year-old girl, Miss Jessie Theall of North Houston, Tex., writes, "My first six entertainments that I played the violin for, paid me $39.25 besides all the pleasure of playing for my friends."

$10 to $40 in Two Hours

A busy mother, Mrs. Anna M. Lewis of Northfield, Ohio, recently learned to play the violin in just the few odd moments she could spare from her household duties, and now earns many welcome dollars to help clothe and educate her four children. "At weddings and church socials I get from $10 to $40 for a couple of hours playing," she writes. "I am invited everywhere, and my home is so much happier."

The new way is fun—not drudgery. You'll begin to play melodies almost from the start. You don't have to pin yourself down to regular hours and regular classes. You practice whenever you can, and learn as quickly as you please.

Save Months of Time

"I have learned to play better than many a conservatory student in easily one-eighth the time," writes Miss Kitty Breany, 154 Warren St., Paterson, N. J. "The lessons are so interesting that they seem like play. A lady I know spent $400 for a private teacher, but her playing cannot begin to compare with mine."

You can do what Miss Breany has done. Youngsters of from 10 to 12 years have done it, and people as old as sixty have found new interest and enjoyment in learning to play a musical instrument. You don't have to listen while others entertain. You can be the talented person who is the center of attraction; who holds the audience fascinated; who wins the applause—and the dollars.

Plays in Orchestra and Band

"I am solo clarinet in a twenty-piece band, (mostly old players)," writes Gerald O. Cairus, 20 High St., Walton, N. Y. "Also am member of an eighteen-piece orchestra whose director has studied in all the large conservatories of America and Germany. He was astonished when I told him how I learned to play."

"In three months I was playing saxophone in the High School orchestra. The fourth month I organized a profitable dance orchestra," writes George Johnson, 402 Newton St., Salisbury, Md. "And now, at college, I play in concerts of the Musical Club in New York, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, etc."

Learn to Play Any Instrument

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Harmony and Composition
Violin	
Drums and Traps	Sight Singing
Banjo	Guitar
Tenor Banjo	Ukulele
Mandolin	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Clarinet	Harp
Flute	Cornet
Saxophone	Piccolo
Voice and Speech Culture	Trombone
Automatic Finger Control	

Three Months From Today You, Too, Can Play

Is it the piano that you wish to play, or the organ, violin, guitar, harp or cello? Do you want to learn to sing from notes? Are you eager to play "jazz" on the banjo, clarinet, Saxophone, trombone, or the drum and traps? Does the cornet call to you, or the flute or piccolo? Would you love to learn the ukulele (the Hawaiian steel guitar)? Choose your favorite—and play it three months from today.

You will learn by notes—the only practical way for you to learn. There are no "numbers" and no "tricks" in this marvelous method. You learn to read your notes just as you are able to read the letters that make a word, and you will be able to recognize and play them so that they will make a melody. You learn harmonies like you learn phrases and expressions of speech and you learn time like you learn pronunciation.

Free Book Explains All About This New Method

Send for this free, valuable book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home." It costs you nothing. You obligate yourself in no way whatever. Everyone interested in music ought to read the story of this wonderful new simplified method.

It will tell you how you can make music a delightful hobby or a money-maker for your spare hours; how you can take the first steps to a profitable musical career if you are dissatisfied with your present life work; how you can be a social favorite, and go everywhere or have fun at home; how you can do these delightful things quickly, easily and at a cost so low that it will surprise you.

Special Short-Time Offer

This Free Book also tells about a Special Short-time Offer now being made to music-lovers. Mail the coupon at once for your copy. Remember, it obligates you in no way whatever. It is FREE! Act now before the supply is exhausted!

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC

406 Brunswick Building
New York City

Please write Name and Address plainly so that there will be no difficulty in booklet reaching you.

Every Music Lover Should Have this Amazing FREE Book

Hundreds of happy musicians all over America have helped to write this absorbing, inspiring book. You will read the fact-stories of dozens of people situated just as you are today. Their actual personal experiences are wonderful proofs to you that your success can be equally great. You will be amazed and delighted to see how marvelously the New Method has reduced the intricacies of music to such astonishing ease and simplicity. The book is FREE—but you should send for it right away before all copies may be gone!

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
406 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," and particulars of your special offer. I am interested in the following course:

(Name of Instrument or Course)

Name _____
(Please Write Plainly)

Address _____

City _____ State _____

COOK AND BAKE

With Amazing New Invention

No More Sweltering Kitchens in Summer—No More Fires to Build—No More Dirty Heavy Coal—No More Ashes—No more unsightly Soutflue—No More Smelly, Sooty Oil Stoves to Clutter Kitchen. No More Slavery to a Hot Kitchen Stove.

Makes Your Range A Gas Stove

Here is the amazing new invention. The Oliver Oil-Gas Burner—that in one minute, makes your present coal or wood range into a real gas stove that turns on and off with a valve. Gives much or little heat—only when you want it—at a twist of your wrist. Just like using city gas.

Wonderful Baking Bake right in your good old oven—better and quicker than ever before. Don't waste final and get yourself all sort of sorts by nursing a hot fire all day just for cooking and baking. With this wonderful invention you simply turn a valve, strike a match, and light your fire. In a jiffy the oven is at a fine even temperature—any degree you want. Put in your roast or baking—put on your stew or vegetables. Go away and forget them. Come back when they are done, turn the valve—fire is out instantly—and you leave your kitchen cool and sweet all day long.

Burns 95% Air, 5% Oil (Fits Any Stove)

Mr. Oliver's wonderful invention is made in sixteen models—fits any kind of cook stove or range without changes or drilling. You set it in your firebox in one minute. Presto! You have a gas stove. Absolutely safe, it lasts a lifetime. 150,000 in use.

AGENTS Earn $40 to $80 a week spare! Chas. $260 a week full time. Territory manager making $5,000 to $15,000 a year. I give Fords to my producers. Big Summer season is just starting. Address me personally, Mr. E. M. Oliver, Pres., at factories shown, below for sales plan and Exclusive Territory.

30 Days Free Trial

You don't have to be satisfied with reading about the Oliver. You can test it for 30 days—bake with it in your own oven—on Mr. Oliver's Free Trial Offer. Write at once—don't delay—and you will be in time to receive Mr. Oliver's Special Low Introductory Price and 30 Day Free Trial Offer, together with his attractive Free Booklet, "New Kind of Heat." No obligation, send a postcard, now, before you turn the page. Know the blessing of this amazing invention.

OLIVER OIL-GAS BURNER & MACHINE CO.,
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2 TIRES FOR $9.95

FREE TUBE WITH EACH TIRE (SIZE 28 x 3)

Standard Tire Prices Smashed Again!

—and some sensational cut, too! Think of it—two tires for almost the price of one and a FREE inner tube with each tire. *No double treads or reused tires.* Thousands of customers are getting maximum mileage out of these tires, and you, too, can get up to

10,000 MILES

Here's your opportunity—if you act at once. This is a special lot selected for this record-breaking sale. Order today—right now. They're going fast.

Compare These Amazing Reductions on Two Tires of Same Size

SIZE	1 TIRE	2 TIRES	SIZE	1 TIRE	2 TIRES
28x3	$6.75	$ 9.95	31x4	$10.65	$17.45
30x3	7.35	11.95	32x4	11.35	19.75
30x3½	8.35	13.95	33x4	12.45	20.90
32x3½	9.45	15.95	34x4	13.25	21.95

Prices on larger sizes quoted on request. Prices f. o. b. Chicago.

SEND NO MONEY! We ship subject to examination, by Express before payment of C. O. D. charges, or by Parcel Post after payment of C. O. D. charges. Examine tires on arrival, and if not absolutely satisfied, return same unused and your money will be promptly refunded. Specify straight side or clincher. ACT NOW.

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1806 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 40-F Chicago, Ill.

32 Cal. Military Automatic 9.75 10 SHOT

Send No Money

Your opportunity to get a $35.00 regular brand new military blue steel Automatic for only $9.75. Never before sold near this price. Shoots 10 shots. Has double safety. Extra magazine free if you order at once. Shoots standard cartridges. Send no money. Order by number. Pay your postman price plus postage on arrival.

No. M1207—32 Cal. Military Model. Extra Magazine Free. $9.75

No. M1208—25 Cal. 7 shot Automatic $7.75

Free Catalog on request

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

Each automatic is sold with an ironclad guarantee of perfect service for one year or money back after examination if not satisfied.

PARAMOUNT TRADING CO., 34 W. 28th St., Dept. M, N.Y.C.

25 Song Parodies 25c

Be a parlor entertainer. Make a hit with the crowd. 25 parodies including "Georgette," "Hot Lips," "The Souse," "Three O'clock In The Morning," "Tomorrow," and all the big hits mailed on receipt of 25c in stamps, special get-acquainted price. TRUMAN BROWN, 6219 Delmar, St. Louis, Mo.

THE MOON TERROR

(Continued from page 80)

As he did so he turned his eyes upon me—and the blood seemed to freeze within my veins! Not to my dying day shall I forget the awful power of that look!

But only for a second did this last—for I had already drawn another grenade and was in the act of hurling it. This time the bomb fell directly at the feet of the high priest and burst with deadly force.

Even while the old man's eyes were boring through me with that unearthly fury, Kwo-Sung-tao was blown to fragments!

An instant later the sun vanished, and a ghostly semi-night fell like a thunderbolt!

IT WAS several days later when Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, Ensign Hallock and myself returned to the Mare Island navy yard at San Francisco.

And there, for the first time, we learned that the world remained intact and was out of danger.

When we had ascertained that we three were the only survivors of our expedition, we had started wandering over the mountains through the semi-darkness until we found the destroyer. Unable to navigate the vessel, we had taken the hydroplane, which Hallock knew how to handle, and started south. Engine trouble had prolonged our trip.

Back from the grave, as it seemed, we listened with tremendous elation to the story of the wounded planet's convalescence.

That last terrible upheaval, just before the destruction of the sorcerers' power plant, had seemed for a time to be the actual beginning of the end. But, instead, it had proved to be the climax—after which the earthquakes had begun rapidly to die out. Scientists now declared that before long the earth would regain its normal stability.

With our return, the story of the Seuen-H'sin was given to the public. So universal became the horror with which that sect was regarded that an international expedition proceeded into China and dealt vigorously with the sorcerers.

The tremendous changes that had been wrought in the surface of the planet presently lost their novelty.

And New York and other cities that had been destroyed, or partially so, speedily were rebuilt.

Here I must not omit one other strange incident connected with these events.

One evening, nearly two years after our encounter with the sorcerers, Dr. Gresham and I were sitting at the window of his New York apartment, idly watching the moon rise above the range of housetops to the east of Central Park.

Suddenly I began to stare at the disk with rapt interest. Clutching the astronomer by the sleeve, I exclaimed excitedly:

"Look there! Odd I never noticed it before! The face of the Man in the Moon is the living image of that Chinese devil, Kwo-Sung-tao!"

"Yes!" agreed Dr. Gresham with a shudder. "And it makes my flesh creep even to look at it!"

THE END

Men Sing Hymn As They Go To Death

MAROONED on a floating ice cake in the Missouri River, with all hope of rescue gone, Harvey McIntosh and his brother, Tom, of Mondamin, Iowa, bravely sang, "Nearer My God to Thee," while the ice floe carried them to a swift and certain death. Their friends lined either side of the river, but were unable to reach them. Night came on, and from the darkness came the strains of the old hymn, which gradually grew fainter and then ended in silence.

No. 77 X1 No. 77 X2 No. 77 X3

Dazzling Kimberlites

Cannot be told from genuine diamonds. A new discovery makes Kimberlites the brightest, snappiest, most beautiful stones on the market. Full of rainbow fire and will stand any test. Ladies' Square Top and Basket Tiffany are set in pure Sterling Silver. Gents' engraved Belcher in 14k oboll. engraved green gold. State size and order by number. Exceptionally low prices to introduce.

Ladies' Square Top $2.85
Ladies' Basket Tiffany 2.60
Gents' Heavy Belcher 2.70

SEND NO MONEY

Just pay the postman when your ring arrives, our special price, plus a few cents postage. Your money back at once if you are not highly pleased after examination. ORDER NOW. Novelty catalog free.

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320 PAGES, ILLUSTRATED, CLOTH
By Winfield Scott Hall, M. D., Ph. D.

SEX FACTS MADE PLAIN

What every young man and Every young woman should know;
What every young husband and Every young wife should know;
What every parent should know.

$1.00 POSTPAID Mailed in plain wrapper. *Table contents and commendations on request*

AMERICAN PUB. CO., 677 Winston Bldg., Philadelphia

Free Proof

You Can Learn to Dance In One Evening at Home!

Why be a wallflower? Why miss most of the real fun when you can so easily learn to dance in a single evening right in the privacy of your own home?

Aren't they foolish to envy wonderful dancing ability when they could so easily and quickly learn to dance in their own home?

WEEK end parties—little social affairs—formal and informal occasions—regular dances—the phonograph or orchestra going with toe-tickling music—couples whirling around, dancing the very latest steps—everybody happy, carefree, and having a fine time!

It's a shame for you not to know how to dance, when it is so easy to learn. Arthur Murray, America's greatest dancing teacher, has perfected a wonderful new method that enables you to learn any of the very latest dances in a few minutes—and to learn all of them in a few hours.

Even if you don't know one step from another, you can very quickly learn to dance in a single evening through this method. You don't need to leave your home to learn—you can master any dance in your own room after a few practice steps. And you can now prove it—at Arthur Murray's expense. He will teach you to dance in one evening or your lessons won't cost you a cent. Then, at the very next affair when dancing begins, you can step right out with absolute confidence that every movement you make is perfectly correct, whether you are dancing the Fox Trot, One Step, Waltz, or any of the newer steps.

Learn Without Partner or Music

With Arthur Murray's remarkable correspondence method, you don't need any one to explain the simple instructions — neither do you actually require music. After you have learned the steps alone in your own room, you can dance perfectly with any one. It will also be quite easy for you to dance in correct time on any floor to any orchestra or phonograph music.

This is Arthur Murray, Dancing Instructor to the Vanderbilts and many other fashionable people. He has taught more than 90,000 people how to dance, through his unique easy learn-at-home methods

Arthur Murray is recognized as America's foremost authority on social dancing. Such people as the Vanderbilts, Ex-Governor Locke Craig, of North Carolina, as well as scores of other socially prominent people, chose Mr. Murray as their dancing instructor. In fact, dancing teachers the world over take lessons from him. And more than 90,000 people have successfully learned to become wonderful dancers through his learn-at-home system.

Special Free Proof Offer

Private instruction in Mr. Murray's studio would cost you $10 for each lesson. But through his new method of teaching dancing in your own home, you get the same high-class instruction at a ridiculously low price. And if you aren't delighted, it doesn't cost you a penny.

Here is Mr. Murray's special offer—made for a limited time and the right is reserved to withdraw it at any time without notice. He will send you the following sixteen lessons for five days' free trial.

The Correct Dancing Position—How to Gain Confidence—How to Follow Successfully—The Art of Making Your Feet Look Attractive—The Correct Walk in the Fox Trot—The Basic Principles in Waltzing—How to Waltz Backward—The Secret of Leading—The Chasse in the Fox Trot—The Forward Waltz Step—How to Leave One Partner to Dance with Another—How to Learn and Also Teach Your Child to Dance—What the Advanced Dancer Should Know—How to Develop Your Sense of Rhythm—Etiquette of the Ballroom.

Send No Money—Not One Cent

All you need to do to get these sixteen lessons is to simply fill in and mail the coupon and the complete sixteen lessons will be promptly sent. When the postman hands them to you, just deposit $1.00 with him, plus a few cents postage, in full payment. Then examine the system carefully for five days, follow the easy instructions and prove to yourself that you have found the quickest, easiest, most delightful method to learn to dance. If, within 5 days you desire to do so, return the course and your dollar will be promptly refunded to you. But if you decide to keep the course—as you surely will—it is yours without any further payment.

You positively can not fail to become a perfect dancer if you follow the few easy instructions. In fact your satisfaction is guaranteed. Remember, you send no money in advance, just sign and mail the coupon and the complete sixteen-lesson course will come to you by return mail. But mail the coupon now—you may never see this offer again.

ARTHUR MURRAY
Studio 766 290 Broadway New York

ARTHUR MURRAY, Studio 766
290 Broadway, New York

To prove that you can teach me to dance in one evening at home you may send the sixteen-lesson course and when the postman hands it to me I will deposit $1.00 with him (plus a few cents postage) in full payment. If within five days I decide to return the course I may do so and you will refund my money promptly and without question.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Would You Like to Teach Dancing? _____

If apt to be out when postman calls you may send one dollar with coupon.

Here's What a Few Say:

I am well satisfied that your way of teaching is best. I have taken lessons from dancing teachers in Huntington, W. Va., Chattanooga, Tenn., and Birmingham, Ala. Your instructions are better than the personal teachers, and thru your methods I am becoming a good dancer. I will do all in my power to get new pupils for you.
J. T. BERRY,
Anniston, Ala.

I want to tell you how wonderful your course is. I was taught by other dancing teachers, but I prefer your lessons because I accomplished more and learned more quickly thru your lessons than by other teachers. I am now enjoying myself very much, and advise all those who want to know the correct way of dancing to take your lessons. I am enjoying many pleasant hours.
E. P. MORRIS,
3497 Elgin Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Can.

I am delighted with the lessons. People are amazed at the ease with which one grasps the idea from your directions. I feel grateful to you.
GRACE THREFALL,
Guler, Wash.

I have made use of all the instructions sent me and am well pleased with the course.
BEULAH ROGERS,
4471 Monroe Street, Chicago, Ill.

Your course has given me a good knowledge of dancing. I am getting along fine.
WILLIAM KOLICH,
Elizabeth, N. J.

I know your lessons pretty well. I attended a dance Thursday and got a compliment on my dancing. You know I never danced before and when I got into the ballroom I was the equal of them all. They sure were surprised.
ARMOND MAROHL,
Mayville, Wis.

I must say that your dancing course is just simply great! Last night was the first time I danced. I even danced with the best dancers around here, and they all marveled at how well I danced.
HILDA WERTH,
Hampton, Neb.

GET THIS WONDERFUL RING. If You Can Tell It From a Genuine Diamond Send It Back

These amazing, beautiful CORODITE diamonds positively match genuine diamonds in every way—same blazing flash and dazzling play of brilliant rainbow fire. They alone, stand the diamond tests, including the pen test of direct comparison. Like fine experts use all their experience to see any difference. Prove this yourself.

Wear a Coredite Diamond 7 Days Free

Make this test. You risk nothing. Wear a genuine Coredite and a diamond side by side on the same finger for 7 days. If you or your friends can tell the difference, send it back; you won't be out a single penny. That's fair enough. If you keep the ring, the price quoted here is all you pay. No installments. Remember, Coredites have the same cutting as genuine stones.

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Carved ring mates. Beautiful mountings of most modern design, choice of gold or platinum finish. Unqualified 20-year guarantee. Handsome art-leather case free with each ring.

SEND NO MONEY Keep your money right at home. Just send name, address and number of ring wanted and size as shown by slip of paper. Write and we will send you ring for 7 days' wear, send it back and your money will be immediately returned. Send today.

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19 W. Jackson Blvd., Dept. 619 Chicago, Ill.
Sole Importers Genuine Coredite Diamonds

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THE WESTERNER

Regular Swing Out Hand Ejecting Left-Hand Wheeler Revolver

32-20 Cal. 7 Shot
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THE MAN THE LAW FORGOT

(Continued from page 85)

"Here," said he, "is a cipher. It is the symbol of nothing, but, as a circular pencil mark, it is still something."

He erased every trace of the pencil and exhibited the blank piece of paper.

"This," he explained, "illustrates your status. In human affairs, you are a cipher with the rim rubbed out. A man legally dead is less than nothing."

VII.

LUIGI ROMANO, who had succeeded Guisseppi in Rosina's affections, was among the first to hear of the abduction.

Blazing with passion, he laid his plans with quick decision and took the trail. Without great difficulty, he traced the route of the taxicab, block by block, to its destination.

Depressed by his fruitless mission in search of a marriage license, Guisseppi was hurrying toward the building in which Rosina was imprisoned. His eyes were bent upon the ground in deep thought. His face was white and drawn.

Luigi stepped from the shelter of a doorway with a sawed-off shotgun in his hands. . . .

WHEN the police arrived, a little crowd of Italians had gathered.

They shrugged their shoulders and spread their palms. Nobody had seen anything; nobody had heard anything; nobody knew anything. But one thing was plain—the dead man, sprawled on the sidewalk, was dead this time to stay dead.

"O yes," said Attorney Malato, who had looked after Luigi's case, "they arrested Luigi all right. But they turned him loose. Why not? This boy Guisseppi could not be punished by the law, but neither could he claim in the slightest degree the protection of the law. Since he had no legal life, it was no crime to kill him. He was a legal problem, and Luigi solved it in about the only way it could be solved—with a sawed-off shotgun."

It is often wondered why the earth is round instead of being some other shape. This is because of the attraction of gravity, which tends to pull everything toward the center of the world. It can be seen that even if the earth was originally some other shape, in the course of a few years this influence would have pulled it into its present shape.

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Earaches	Insomnia	Rheumatism	
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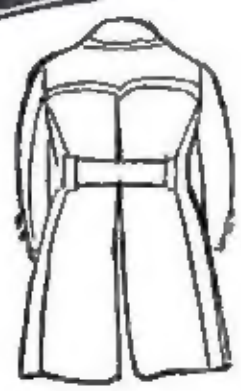

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